



## LAW CAREER TAKES ALUMNA WEST TO WINE COUNTRY

After the tragic events of Sept. 11, 2001, when several federal agencies were undergoing reorganization, Suzanne M. Sirotnak, Esq. '90 faced a key career decision: she could remain in a comfortable position – a staff attorney for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives – or take a step into the unknown by accepting an appointment with a newly created agency.

“The position would be in an uncertain work environment, not knowing where my office would even be physically located,” Sirotnak says. “But the duties entailed a subject matter that I truly loved.”

While the decision was a difficult one, Sirotnak was confident in her choice to become Senior Counsel West for the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB), a small agency within the U.S. Treasury Department that was created by the Homeland Security Act of 2003.

“I took the risk,” she says from San Francisco, Calif., where she is now located. “Today, I have a great job in a great city, working with dedicated and professional people on a subject matter that is absolutely interesting and intriguing. The rest is history, but had I not taken that first step, it never would have been written.”

The TTB collects alcohol, tobacco, firearms and ammunition excise taxes;

ensures these products are labeled, advertised and marketed in accordance with the law; and administers the laws and regulations in a manner that protects the consumer and revenue.

Sirotnak represents the government in administrative proceedings involving the Federal Alcohol Administration Act, the Alcohol Beverage Labeling Act, the Webb Kenyon Act, and the Internal Revenue Code; assists in field investigations and revenue audits; and helps industry members understand the federal statutes and issues that affect their businesses.

Sirotnak’s area of expertise is the wine industry, and her work takes her throughout the west coast and as far east as the Mississippi River.

While her job takes her far and wide, Sirotnak’s interest in law is deeply rooted back home in northeastern Pennsylvania.

She was drawn to a career in law because her grandfather, Hon. John J. Sirotnak, was a judge on the Common Pleas Court of Lackawanna County.

“I have fond memories of my grandfather and those memories were very influential in my life as well as in choosing a career in law,” she says.

In fact, a photograph of the Lackawanna County courthouse hangs in Sirotnak’s office.

“It’s the most cherished thing in my office,” she says. “It’s an anchor of my connection to Scranton, my family and this career.”

If personal connections led her to law, her time at The University of Scranton prepared her for the daily challenges of her career. Sirotnak participated in Scranton’s four-year accelerated B.A./M.A. program.

“It was a very heavy work load, and very demanding with deadlines and classes,” Sirotnak says. “It forced me to ‘prioritize the priorities’ and apply myself in a very structured manner in an ever-changing environment.”

Sirotnak, who received her J.D. from the Thomas M. Cooley Law School in 1995, says the skills she learned at Scranton have helped her bring necessary structure and organization to her daily routine.

“I think there is a direct correlation between how I handle my ever-changing work and case load to my past days spent locked away in the basement of the University’s library, preparing for classes, papers and exams,” she says.

“My education and my upbringing in Scranton challenged me to think on my own and for myself, and to take pride in the sense of accomplishment. It also taught me to look at all things, aspects and people fairly, and to reserve judgment until all the facts are gathered.”

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Suzanne M. Sirotnak

As the Senior Counsel West for the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau, a small agency within the U.S. Treasury Department, Suzanne M. Sirotnak, Esq. '90 represents the government in administrative proceedings involving the Federal Alcohol Administration Act, the Alcohol Beverage Labeling Act, the Webb Kenyon Act, and the Internal Revenue Code. Sirotnak's area of expertise is the wine industry, and she fittingly works in an office located in San Francisco, Calif.