

# INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ATTORNEY PRACTICES WORLDWIDE FROM BILLINGS

by Patrice Manget

Intellectual property traditionally encompasses four things: patents (inventions), trademarks (source identifiers), copyrights (creative works) and trade secrets (recipes and the like). Technology law deals with software development, licensing and Internet law.



*Antoinette M. Tease, Registered Patent Attorney.*

Intellectual property and technology Law firms are universally thought to have global headquarters in places like New York or London. Many Montanans assume there is no such law firm in Montana and, unfortunately, suffer the inconvenience and high fees of out-of-state firms.

Newsflash! Practicing right here in Billings is the eminently qualified and highly experienced firm of Antoinette M. Tease, P.L.L.C., Registered Patent Attorney.

Born in Connecticut, Toni studied pre-med at Harvard and returned to Connecticut for law school. While clerking for U.S. District Judge David Ezra in Honolulu, she traveled to Montana for a case. There in chambers at the federal courthouse, she met U.S. District Judge Jack Shanstrom's law clerk Leif Johnson and "it was love at first sight! A year and a half later, he proposed to me in Glacier National Park."

Toni was set to start with an international law firm in New York, but Fargo-born and Montana-educated Leif wasn't keen on city life. They compromised and worked in DC for three years. In 1995, they moved to Billings when Leif began work as a federal prosecutor. Toni was soon working for the Crowley law firm, where she made partner and likewise started their intellectual property and technology law practice group.

In 2001 she went to work in-house for a Montana software development company. "I wanted to understand the business as well as the legal issues these companies face," Toni explains, "so I could be a better advisor to them. And there's no doubt in my mind that I am a better advisor as a result of that experience."

With her boys ready to start school, on October 1, 2003, Toni hung out her own shingle. Working from her home office with a downtown virtual office providing conference facilities and admin staff, Toni has four patent draftsmen, a paralegal/secretary, accountant, and patent and trademark search firm to support her international practice. She files and prosecutes patent and trademark applications for clients throughout the country as well as in foreign countries and manages both national and foreign litigation primarily for Montana clients.

With a leadership position in the American Bar Association Section of Intellectual Property Law, Toni is chair of the section's Computer Software Technology Committee. As one of only 12 attorneys selected nationwide, she serves on an ABA task force that develops recommendations on patent law reforms.

In closing, Toni shares a remarkable personal story. "We never knew very much about my father's family," she begins. "Last February, my mother sent me an old photograph of a man and a woman on horseback.

Mom's enclosed note said: "These might be your great-grandparents on their homestead in Montana."



*Montana homesteaders Joseph and Emma DeGrand.*

A week later, Toni and Leif were 30 miles northwest of Terry, in Prairie County, standing on the homestead of her great-great-uncle and aunt, Joseph and Emma DeGrand. "We found their dugout," she exclaims, "and saw the shelter belt they'd planted and the hillside recess where they built their barn!"

The DeGrands lived on their homestead from 1913 until 1938, when the federal government bought back the land and they retired to Cooke City. At one time there were plans to build a railroad town called DeGrand. The town was never built, but Emma was the postmistress for DeGrand, Montana; their cabin was the post office.

"That picture changed my life because I always felt like an East Coaster who was here by invitation, but now I feel I am here by right," Toni confides. "My family has roots here. I'm a true Montanan."

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