

Litigation Firm Wheeler Trigg O'Donnell Turns Twenty

News

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Denver: The law firm of Wheeler Trigg O'Donnell LLP (WTO) celebrates the 20th anniversary of its founding in Denver, Colorado, on February 1, 1998.

WTO represents sophisticated clients nationwide in high-stakes civil trials, arbitrations, appeals, and related litigation, including class actions, mass torts, and multidistrict litigation. The firm represents its clients in federal and state courtrooms, in administrative offices, and at negotiating tables across the country.

Founding, Culture, & Growth

The firm was established on February 1, 1998, as Wheeler Trigg Kennedy. [Malcolm Wheeler](#), [Jack Trigg](#), [Michael O'Donnell](#), Paul Hultin (ret. 2012), and the late Mark Kennedy (1952-2009) recognized that a top-tier litigation boutique, based in Denver, could serve coastal clients in high-stakes trials and litigation at mid-market rates.

Michael O'Donnell has served as Chairman since the firm's inception. "We set out to guide clients through the most complex civil litigation in the nation, and to develop a collegial and collaborative culture in which trial lawyers and litigators do what's right for our clients in the smartest possible way. That has worked well for us since day one."

The firm started with 19 lawyers and 34 staff in downtown Denver. At the time, two clients accounted for 70% of the firm's work. Twenty years later, the firm is proud to count these companies as clients still. Today, 95 lawyers supported by 105 staff in Denver and St. Louis represent hundreds of sophisticated clients across a broad range of litigation practice areas and industries nationwide. Representative clients include Whirlpool, Michelin, General Electric, USAA, Pfizer, Mercedes-Benz, numerous law firms and hospitals, and many more.

WTO lives up to its trademark, Trial Tested™, by routinely taking high-stakes cases to trial and winning for its Fortune 500 clients. In 2000, in *Geier v. American Honda*, founding partner Malcolm Wheeler argued successfully in the U.S. Supreme Court to win the precedential opinion on federal preemption standards as applied to airbags in the automotive industry. Since then, WTO attorneys have won more than 140 trials and arbitrations nationally and more than 75 appellate opinions, including in nearly all of the federal circuit courts and numerous state supreme courts. The firm's pro bono contributions include the nine-year copyright case, *Golan v. Holder*, to which multiple WTO attorneys dedicated significant time as the case made its way to the U.S. Supreme Court in 2012.

Milestones

In addition to its noteworthy legal work, the firm marked a number of milestones in the past two decades.

The firm established the Wheeler Trigg O'Donnell Foundation in 2005. The Foundation provides opportunities for current and former lawyers, staff, their families, and friends to build camaraderie and a caring community by helping those in need outside of the firm. "A firm can't be a first-rate institution without looking out for its community, too," says O'Donnell. To date, the Foundation has donated nearly \$2

million to nonprofit organizations. On average, 85% of firm personnel participate in Foundation efforts each year.

Following the untimely passing of co-founder Mark Kennedy in 2009, the firm became Wheeler Trigg O'Donnell LLP. The name change recognized the extraordinary contributions of founder and chairman Mike O'Donnell.

In 2012, WTO moved from its original space to Denver's Republic Plaza, where it occupies four floors. In 2015, the firm opened its St. Louis office with two attorneys and two staff.

Recognition

Numerous rankings directories and publications recognize WTO and its lawyers as leaders in litigation. The firm perhaps is most proud of those that recognize its culture.

In 2018 and 2016, the national workplace rankings directory Vault named WTO to its annual list of the Nationwide Top 10 Best Midsize Law Firms to Work For. Vault surveys associates on such areas as complexity of work, opportunity for advancement, quality of life, and firm culture.

In 2008, 2010, and 2012, the Denver Business Journal named WTO the number one Best Place to Work in its size category, based on surveys of WTO personnel. WTO has appeared in the Top 10 every year the awards have been given and in the top three each of the past three years.

Chambers USA 2017 ranks WTO in Band 1 in Colorado for Commercial Litigation. The directory individually lists eight WTO lawyers for their litigation skills. That is twice as many as the next closest firm in the state. Chambers also recognizes WTO in Band 2 Nationwide for Product Liability & Mass Torts Defense, among the top 15 firms in the U.S. doing such work.

In 2017, Benchmark Litigation named WTO the Colorado Firm of the Year based on the complexity of cases handled and outcomes delivered for clients.

In 2015 and 2016, The National Law Journal twice named WTO to its annual Midsize Hot List. Only 20 firms in the nation make the list, which has been on hiatus since 2016.

“WTO would not be the firm it is without the trust of our clients and the effort and contributions of all of our personnel,” says O’Donnell. “We look forward to serving our clients and the community for many years to come.”

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Since 2004, Wheeler Trigg O’Donnell lawyers have won 140 trial verdicts and complex arbitrations, and 76 significant appeals nationwide for our clients. Established in 1998, WTO currently numbers 100 lawyers. The firm represents sophisticated clients in high-stakes civil trials, appeals, arbitrations, and related matters, including class actions, mass torts, and multidistrict litigation.