



Surbhi Garg

Outstanding Young Lawyer of the Year

BY BRENDAN BAKER

The CBA Young Lawyers Division annually honors a rising attorney with the Gary McPherson Award for Outstanding Young Lawyer of the Year. Surbhi Garg is the 2018 award recipient.

Surbhi followed a circuitous path to Colorado, and the law. She was born in India, spent part of her childhood in Australia, and moved with her family to Chicago when she was 9 years old. There were no lawyers in her immediate family or social circle, and she did not grow up contemplating a career in law. However, she was academically inclined and particularly loved reading, writing, and problem solving. As is the case for so many other inquisitive students, these personal qualities led Surbhi to eventually consider law school as an appealing source for intellectual challenges.

Surbhi did not have a connection to Colorado before law school, but the University of Colorado offered her a scholarship, and when she came out to visit she quickly became convinced that this was the right place for her. She appreciated the climate and scenery, and the school visit impressed upon her that the CU Law community valued being good citizens as well as scholars.

Law school was a great experience for Surbhi, who found the intellectual engagement and rigor she was looking for. Because she felt she was coming from a place of relative ignorance about the legal profession compared to some of her classmates, she consciously sought out mentors and a professional/personal support network. This brought her into contact with the CBA and the various specialty bars and groups, particularly the South Asian Bar Association, the Asian Pacific American Bar Association, and



Little Mendelson attorneys Laurie Rust, Surbhi Garg, Adrienne Scheffey, and Jennifer Harpole at the South Asian Bar Association of Colorado's Second Annual Gala.

Moot Court. Meeting people at these events allowed Surbhi to lay the groundwork for her career while still in law school.

After graduating in 2013, Surbhi first joined Kissinger & Fellman, which she had initially connected with through one of her professors. There she got her first exposure to employment law. She found she enjoyed working in employment litigation due to the constant opportunities for problem solving. The law is always changing, and no two situations are ever exactly alike, but one can still connect with the fact patterns. As Surbhi's experience grew, she observed that companies mostly want to do the right thing and to do right by their employees, but they don't always know the best way to

do that. She enjoys helping companies meet these laudable goals, and advising them when they have fallen short. As she moved between clients and firms, she kept this strong focus on employment law. Now working for Littler Mendelson, Surbhi supports employers through critical issues such as litigation, corporate changes, trainings, and general employment matters. She is skilled at understanding her clients' businesses and specific needs.

While growing her practice, Surbhi remained involved in bar activities. She was twice elected president of the South Asian Bar Association of Colorado (SABA-CO), in 2016 and 2017. She also joined the CBA's Diversity Leadership Council, and found that was a great sounding

board for her experiences and perceptions as she developed her career.

The supportive role of bar associations really came into the forefront for Surbhi after the last presidential election. She observed a lot of fear in the various communities she is a part of and works with, and she wanted to be part of the discussion. She was able to reach out to attorneys within her network to spearhead the “Beyond the Safety Pin—How to Be an Active Ally” event with the other diversity bars. And she is especially proud of leading SABA-CO in organizing its first Gala in 2017, which sold out and set the groundwork for an impressive annual event. Recalling these experiences, Surbhi says, “It was remarkable to see that even though I was so young and new in my career, people accepted my perspective and were interested and wanted me to participate in events. It was very empowering.”

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Surbhi points out that joining and actively participating in professional organizations such as the CBA can feel intimidating, but they are really just groups of people looking for ways to make an impact. Once you realize this, it makes everyone involved more relatable, and it becomes exciting to work together to make

real improvements. Surbhi’s advice for young attorneys: “Get involved! It seems hard to take the time, but it does pay off—even if much later than anticipated.” She suggests that young attorneys start by meeting potential colleagues without purpose or intent, and points out that it is easier to work with and even against other counsel when you know them outside the context of legal conflict. “Be interested in who people are, and look for who you connect with—those will be the people who make your career.” Surbhi particularly credits CBA members Neeti Pawar and Laurie Rust as mentors and colleagues who have supported her growth as an attorney.

Currently Surbhi is going back and forth between Colorado and California, where both she and her husband have professional contacts. She is taking the California bar exam and is excited to learn more about the differences in Colorado and California employment law. But regardless of where the bulk of her practice is located, she asserts that she will always remain actively involved in the Colorado legal community. She especially appreciates that compared to other legal communities, this one is still small and active enough that people can really get to know each other and establish collegiality.

In addition to maintaining a legal practice, Surbhi runs the nonprofit Vibrant South Asian, which she founded with her husband to help educate the community about South Asian people, places, and cultures. She has a beagle, Sully, and family still residing in Chicago. Reading is a favorite hobby, and she says she is usually planning a trip either to explore a new area or to visit family; she recently traveled to South Africa.

Wherever Surbhi’s career and interests take her, she exemplifies the best qualities of a young attorney, and is a fitting recipient of the 2018 Outstanding Young Lawyer of the Year Award. 

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