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Phone: +1 646 783 7100 | Fax: +1 646 783 7161 | customerservice@law360.com

Washington Powerhouse: K&L Gates

By **Steven Lerner**

Law360 (September 3, 2025, 4:00 PM EDT) -- K&L Gates LLP's Washington team obtained multiple wins for Amazon this year while racking up more accomplishments, including guiding software company Center ID Corp. in its sale to American Express, helping Mackay Restaurant Management Group reach a settlement in a trademark dispute and representing the Duwamish Tribe in a victory in federal court.

These major wins and the firm's long-standing community roots in the greater Seattle area helped K&L Gates earn a spot on Law360's 2025 list of Washington Powerhouses.

K&L Gates was founded in 1883 in Seattle, where its lone office in Washington is located. The firm has 169 attorneys in the state, and a global presence of more than 1,000 attorneys.

"We've been around for more than 140 years," Julie Anne Halter, managing partner of the Seattle office, told Law360. "We started out very humbly in Seattle, and we have grown along with our clients to represent them and their interests in the international marketplace."

Halter added that the firm has historical roots in Washington, serving both the business sector and the broader interests of the community.

"We've been here as long as Washington has been a state," K&L Gates partner Gary Kocher told Law360. "There have been a lot of firms that have been entering the market recently, but we've basically been here forever."

K&L Gates has a history of notable local talent on its roster. Jim Ellis, a lawyer who later became one of the namesakes of K&L Gates' predecessor firm Preston Gates & Ellis LLP, was a known civic activist in the Seattle area. Bill Gates Sr., father of Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, was a founding lawyer of the predecessor firm. The late Ninth Circuit Judge Betty Binns Fletcher was a partner at Preston Gates, and Washington Gov. Bob Ferguson also worked at the firm's predecessor.

Michael McKay, a former U.S. attorney, is a partner in the Seattle office.

K&L Gates is well-known in the Seattle community. Associate Isabella Forcino grew up in the area and



told Law360 that she met both Gates and Ellis through volunteer work in high school.

"These people are really a part of our community long before I was applying to law school," Forcino said.

Some of the practice areas in the firm that are strong in Washington include energy, corporate law, litigation and intellectual property.

K&L Gates' clients are some of the most iconic Northwest companies, including Microsoft, Starbucks and Amazon. This past year, K&L Gates helped Amazon secure a victory in a high-stakes dispute with the developers of two utility-scale California solar projects. A Washington state judge ruled in April that Amazon can sue the private equity company and firms tied to the solar energy projects.

The firm also helps startups and growing companies in Washington. Partner Pam Jacobson told Law360 that K&L Gates helps local companies in their early stages with intellectual property guidance.

For example, K&L Gates represented Center ID, a startup that provides expense management software and was acquired by American Express in 2025. Kocher said the firm had represented Center ID for almost 15 years, helping the startup with multiple financing rounds, acquisitions and trademark law work. He added that the sale to American Express involved numerous privacy and banking compliance issues, and there was a high level of due diligence in the acquisition.

In intellectual property, the firm represented Washington-based Mackay Restaurant Management Group in a trademark dispute with Revelry Vintners, with both parties reaching a settlement agreement in February. It also represented Alpenspruce Education Solutions in a trademark dispute with Cascade Parent Ltd. and Parallels Inc., with both parties settling in March.

Jacobson said both wins are examples of the firm's commitment to supporting local businesses in the community in what would otherwise be cost-prohibitive civil litigation.

One of K&L Gates' ongoing efforts in the local community is its support of the Duwamish Tribe. In February, the firm secured a win for the Duwamish Tribe in Washington federal court, with the judge ordering the U.S. Department of the Interior to reconsider the tribe's petition for federal recognition.

K&L Gates partner Bart Freedman told Law360 that supporting the Duwamish Tribe is an important local issue, with thousands of people in the community voluntarily paying rent to the tribe because it doesn't receive federal support.

This year's win is an important step in the Duwamish Tribe's pursuit of federal recognition. Partner Benjamin Mayer told Law360 that if the tribe receives federal recognition, then it could act in a government capacity.

"The most important part of this litigation is the tribe itself, and the tribe is characterized by their resiliency," Forcino added.

Over the past few years, a variety of large firms have established a presence in the Seattle market. Kocher said the first wave involved California-based firms with venture capital practices setting up offices in Seattle that were extensions of their Silicon Valley firms. Lately, some East Coast-based firms have attempted to enter the market. As a result, Kocher said, some of the legacy Seattle firms are no longer in operation.

Preston Gates, the firm's predecessor, merged with Kirkpatrick & Lockhart Nicholson Graham in 2007, allowing the firm to build an international presence. Kocher said its value proposition to clients is that it can handle both local legal matters and help businesses that require support on an international level.

Mayer said he's "proud to be part of this team and what we do for the community."

--Editing by Nicole Bleier.