

Meet Gina Passarella, Editor-in-Chief at The American Lawyer

As a journalist, Gina Passarella has witnessed firsthand the evolution of the legal industry over the last 15 years. Three years ago, she took on a “dream role” of editor-in-chief at *The American Lawyer*, published by American Lawyer Media (ALM).

I recently switched places with Gina and put on my reporter hat to ask about her roles at ALM, her goals and how best to pitch her team. She also dishes on her love for the business of law and her favorite part of her job.

Q: How do you think media coverage has changed since taking over as editor-in-chief of *The American Lawyer*?

I was very fortunate to step into a dream role overseeing the publication at the pinnacle of covering a subject I love, the business of law. My goal is to ensure the publication identifies trends, challenges and opportunities for our readers, and helps them understand and prepare for the evolving nature of the legal industry. We want to be forward-looking, even if it’s further out ahead of the curve than where members of the profession see themselves. We have looked to add in new voices, such as young lawyers or that of the client. We have looked to tackle difficult subjects, like mental health. We have really sought to engage our audience, bringing them into the conversation whenever possible. And we have dug in on the most important topics impacting the business of law – and will continue to do so.

Q: Along with serving as editor-in-chief of *The American Lawyer*, you also serve as editor-in-chief of Global Legal Brands at ALM. What does this role entail?

In this role, I have the opportunity to work with our editors of *Corporate Counsel*, *The National Law Journal*, *Law.com International*, *Legaltech News* and *China Law & Practice* on content strategy and cross-publication opportunities. The role allows ALM to look across our audience segments and the legal services delivery ecosystem to deliver content for our readers that reflects the full spectrum of the legal industry.

Q: In your opinion, what distinguishes ALM/*The American Lawyer* from other legal media?

Across our publications at ALM, we have a common goal: We don’t just tell readers what happened, but why it matters and what it means to their business. Whether it be in a short breaking news piece or a longform analysis piece, we look to leverage our 40-plus years of historical knowledge with the deep insights from our reporters, who are on the ground and across the globe, to bring context to the news of the day. And of course, we are incredibly fortunate to be able to enrich that analysis with a treasure trove of data from our colleagues at ALM Intelligence and Legal Compass.

Q: What do you want your readers to gain from reading *The American Lawyer*?

We take our responsibility to inform and support our readers very seriously. With



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everything we write, our goal is to ensure they gain deeper insights that they couldn't get anywhere else about how they can better run their business, face market realities and grow as an individual or institution. I want them to pick up *The American Lawyer* and say, "Wow, I didn't know that," or "I have been grappling with the same issues. Let me see how my peers are handling it."

Q: What are some of the trends that you've started to or plan to cover this year?

Well, like many of our readers, the plans we had at the start of the year have been altered a bit. We will now, of course, follow closely the short- and long-term impact of COVID-19 on our readers' business.

Other trends we are following include the deregulation of law firm ownership rules, the competition for client business from other services providers, how the industry is working to develop talent and foster client loyalty, and much more.

Q: What is the best way to pitch you and your team?

We are a very reporter-driven culture and hope that many of you have relationships with members across our newsroom. You can always email, call or text them directly, and you can always reach out to me, our executive editor Ben Seal, or the editors of the Business of Law desk: David Bario, Christine Simmons and Lizzy McLellan. If you aren't sure who should get something, send it to a few of us and we will take it from there. We are all talking all day, every day.

Q: What are your preferences for story ideas?

I always tell people the best pitches are something you would want to read if it wasn't about you or your firm. We want to cover news. So look at whether it's novel, fits into a broader trend, highlights a new path for the industry, offers a case study on a topic of interest or otherwise demonstrates something that would benefit our stated goal of educating our readers on the evolution of legal services delivery, the life of the profession's members, or the challenges and opportunities facing the industry.

Q: What is your favorite part about your job?

My favorite aspect of my job is the time I get to spend meeting with readers across the industry to hear directly from them what is happening on the ground and what interesting stories there are to be covered.

Q: How did you get your start reporting in the legal industry?

After finishing graduate school in 2005, I wanted to move back to the South Jersey area where I'm from. I applied for a number of jobs and was lucky that *The Legal Intelligencer*, ALM's Pennsylvania publication, took a shot on a green reporter. I had no idea what the business of law was, but quickly found it fascinating and was able to cover the industry during a tremendous time of evolution and experimentation.

Q: What advice do you like to give to young journalists in the industry?

This really applies to anyone, but relationships are the foundation of all that we do. Meet as many people as you can. Talk to people for more than just a story. Learn and read as much as you can. Call instead of email; meet instead of call. Raise your hand for things outside of your normal day job. Learn as much about your business as those that you cover. Get involved in projects that broaden your knowledge base and visibility in the

organization or community. Build your personal brand. Connect with your audience. Deliver nuanced coverage. Be competitive externally, not internally. Respect what the power of having the ability to publish to the masses brings.

Q: What do you like to do outside of the office?

Life outside of the office revolves around our 6-year-old daughter, Aria, and 1-year-old son, Sam. They make life so much fun and offer so much perspective on what really matters. When we aren't running around with them, or sometimes when we are, we also love to go antiquing. We bought an old house and have filled it with a lot of "old" things. Life is good. We are very lucky.