

NEWS: BUSINESS

What will happen to the US patent office in Denver as its regional director leaves?

Molly Kocialski left after a decade promoting patents and innovation in the nine-state Rocky Mountain region. The Denver office was the second regional office outside of D.C.



Tamara Chuang

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Big changes at the regional hub of the U.S. Patent & Trade Office in Denver came earlier this month when long-time leader Molly Kocialski stepped down as regional director.

No announcement was made after Kocialski left. But after a reporter inquired about the Denver office, the agency updated the Rocky Mountain page to add new interim director Mary Fuller, who already is regional director of the seven-state Western Region Outreach Office in San Jose.

“Nothing more to report beyond Mary Fuller,” said Paul Fucito, a USPTO spokesperson.



Molly Kocalski served as director of the Rocky Mountain Regional United States Patent and Trademark Office for more than nine years and through three U.S. presidents. In 2019, she worked with USPTO director Andrei Iancu, who was nominated by President Donald Trump. The two attended the Denver office's fifth anniversary on Aug. 30, 2019. (Jesse Paul, The Colorado Sun)

Kocalski had become the face of the Rocky Mountain Regional Outreach Office, which covers a nine-state region consisting of Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming and Utah. She traveled regularly, showing up at events and in obscure cities (“My office was a trailblazer- becoming the first official USPTO presence in Sturgis, Fargo, Gillette, Kalispell, Medora, Minot, St. George and many other locations,” she said in her farewell message).

“I can’t tell you how many people said, ‘Molly told me to tell you that she sent me to talk to you,’” said Randy Sasaki, administrator of **ProBoPat Program** at the nonprofit Mi Casa Resource Center in Denver. That’s helped Mi Casa work with an average of 163 applications from low-income individuals on patents every year, compared to maybe 50 applicants a year before the Denver office opened.

“They (Molly’s team) attend everything, from high school events, colleges, trade shows (and) conferences. And again, I get referrals on a regular basis from their office,” he said. “But I think more importantly, what fuels this program are volunteer attorneys and the

regional office has a significant reputation and relationship with all of the national law firms. Everyone knows Molly.”

The Rocky Mountain office is one of four regional outreach offices outside of the USPTO’s Alexandria, Virginia, headquarters. That began after the **America Invents Act** passed in 2011. While **only Detroit is** named in the act, the law required the agency to establish **three more satellite locations** to create a nationwide presence outside of the Washington, D.C., area.

The Denver office **opened in 2014**, followed by regional patent offices in San Jose and Dallas a year later.

What will happen next to the Denver location is not clear. But on her last day, Kocialski said that patent-office IT and support staff around the U.S. who were also members of the National Treasury Employees Union 243 **were notified** that they must return to the office in October.

“No one in Denver got them,” Kocialski said.

How Denver got a patent office

The effort to get Denver a patent office was years in the making by a trio of local lawyers — John Posthumus, Thomas Franklin and Michael Drapkin.

Drapkin, a lawyer at Holland & Hart at the time, credits a Colorado Bar Association-sponsored **event in 2008** when presidential candidates and then-Sens. Barack Obama and John McCain discussed patent reform and the idea of satellite offices.

“The idea at the time was everybody was in D.C. Most people were in person and it seemed like the office was struggling to get talent to be able to examine these patent applications. It made sense, much like Apple’s not just in Cupertino. They go where the talent is,” said Drapkin, now a private patent attorney in Boulder. “We thought a great place to do that was Colorado because it’s such an appealing place to live. A lot of people would come here and be able to work for the office.”

Its other raison d’etre was to “bring the patent office to the people,” Drapkin said.



The Byron G. Rogers Federal Building on 1961 Stout Street in Denver, pictured on Jan. 8, 2019. In 2014, the U.S. Patent & Trademark Office opened its Rocky Mountain Regional office on two floors of the building. (Tamara Chuang, The Colorado Sun)

The office, located in the Byron G. Rogers Federal Building at 1961 Stout St. in Denver, served as the regional headquarters for patent examiners. It has video conferencing equipment so patent examiners didn't have to fly to D.C. for interviews about the patents. There are hearing rooms for **patent judges** who may not have joined the agency if it meant moving to D.C.

Russ Slifer became the first director of the Rocky Mountain office but left a year later after getting **promoted** to deputy director. ("Yes, I would have stayed in Denver if I had not had the opportunity to manage the whole USPTO. I really enjoyed the community and mission of the regional offices," Slifer said in an email.)

By the time Kocialski **started the gig** in January 2016, there was a staff of 130, which included patent examiners (there are now 354 in the Rocky Mountain region with about 230 in Colorado). And she hit the road to fulfill a big part of the job: outreach to the nine-state region.

She met with local economic development folks, regional patent examiners and small business owners and entrepreneurs. She and her team conducted more than 2,200 in-person visits during her nine years, which allowed for longer conversations with inventors to help them avoid mistakes during the patent process.



The U.S. Patent and Trade Office hosts virtual sessions monthly for women entrepreneurs. The Rocky Mountain Regional Office in Denver hosted the Aug. 21, 2024 event in person. (Tamara Chuang, The Colorado Sun)

Connecting law firms to nonprofit organizations like Mi Casa also helped local inventors find their path to creating a product. Sasaki said that some inventors the Mi Casa program has worked with are now selling goods on Amazon.

“What fuels this program are the attorneys,” he said. “And what all regional programs say every quarter is what they’re lacking are more attorneys. Personally, I’ve attended IP conferences in Denver and Utah. Molly gets up on the podium and she pitches this program. This office has influence.”

Law firms continue to expand in Denver though not because of the patent office. According to a [**Denver Business Journal** story](#) last spring, between 2005 and 2024, the number of

firms in Denver with more than 500 attorneys went from eight to 30. And media company ALM (formerly American Lawyer Media) said headcount in Denver offices of the 500 largest firms have grown 26% since 2018.

“For patent and trademark practitioners, the regional office serves as a vital bridge to policy developments and professional growth,” said Rachel Carnaggio, a partner at Holland & Hart, in an email. “USPTO officials are involved in — and often serve in leadership roles — within the IP practitioner community, such as the Colorado Bar Association’s IP Section, IP Inn of Court, and the Rocky Mountain IP Institute, ensuring we stay current on critical updates. These interactions provide a two-way education and communication pipeline on what’s happening on the ground in the region and at USPTO.”

Source: [U.S. Patent & Trademark Office](#) • Note: Dish Network and Dish Wireless are part of the same company but filed for patents under different corporate names. Questions about Colorado patents? [Email reporter Tamara Chuang](#)



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Simultaneously, the Denver-area entrepreneurial community was having its own heyday, with the number of startups calling the city home increasing annually. In 2015, the number of center-city area startups **numbered 623 and 4,359 employees**, according to a report by the Downtown Denver Partnership and Colorado Technology Association. This year? It's **1,500 companies and 7,000** employees.

The amount of venture capital in Colorado has kept the state competitive as out-of-state investors **expanded to the area**. Tech workers have also continued to relocate to the Denver region, which moved up two spots last year to rank No. 8 in the **CBRE 2024 Tech Talent hiring report** from the national commercial real estate firm that tracks the office market.

“Successful creative communities are characterized by the galvanization of a lot of different resources,” said Nathaniel Trelease, founder of the Rocky Mountain Intellectual Property & Technology Institute in Denver. “You need intellectual capital but you also need financial capital and you need other resources, like stakeholders. In this case, it would be the Patent and Trademark Office.”

The momentum was already happening before the local patent office came to town. “But,” he added, “I think it was an important contributor to the success of the innovation reputation that Denver has.”

Why Molly left

Kocialski's last day was Sept. 5.

“My job was dual — outreach and being responsible for the safety and security and the engagement of the employees of the USPTO in my region,” Kocialski said in an interview last week. “It became really clear over the last, especially, I’d say, the last four or five months that the outreach job was changing. The expectations of that job was outreach was only going to be intellectual property basics. And that’s great but you don’t need a 30-year practitioner to do that.”

Kocialski, who took a week off and then joined Holland & Hart, said she felt the focus was less about outreach and more administrative. Approving, tracking and recording events was deemed more important than visiting the communities and chatting with local entrepreneurs to help figure out how to serve them through the patent process.



Molly Kocialski, then-director of the Rocky Mountain Regional United States Patent and Trademark Office, spoke at a news conference celebrating the office's fifth anniversary on Friday, Aug. 30, 2019. (Jesse Paul, The Colorado Sun)

She still participated in panels about the invention process for Colorado Startup Week sessions, which were held at the patent office on Stout Street. She enjoys meeting people in

person.

“What virtual does is cut off all the ancillary conversations that you normally get to have when you attend a conference or another event in person,” she said. “No one’s going to have that side conversation and come up to you and say, ‘Hey, I have this question about my particular situation,’ because they don’t want to put it on a virtual forum that’s going to live forever. It just cuts off the conversation.”

It’s also been a tumultuous year for the patent office, which, like other federal agencies, had a return-to-office mandate, as well as the **federal worker downsizing**.

Rocky Mountain-area patent examiners, long unionized, were able to continue working remotely due to their union contract. But on Aug. 28, President Trump issued an **executive order** barring patent employees from collective bargaining and other union involvement due to their “national security work.”

The Patent Office Professional Association, which said it represents 9,000 patent examiners, **sued**. The organization’s automated reply to questions said “Please note our response times will be delayed in view of the Aug 29 (sic), 2025 executive order.”

“I love the agency. I love its mission. I love its vision. I loved the way we got to help people build their dreams. I think that’s so important,” Kocialski said. “I love the way that the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office supported the economy. But it just became clear that my place wasn’t there anymore.”

On Wednesday, John A. Squires started his **first day** as the new director of the USPTO. He was **confirmed** last week by the U.S. Senate. In the welcome **announcement**, Squires called it “the honor of a lifetime.”

Fucito, the USPTO spokesperson, said no information about the future of the Denver office was available.

Times have changed since Drapkin began pursuing the Denver office nearly 20 years ago. Many people are used to, and often prefer, remote work.

“The way it evolved over time was that more and more people started to work remotely for the patent office and that was allowed. So the idea of having remote hubs away from the patent office became less important,” Drapkin said.

“But I also really think that all of the educational and outreach initiatives that Molly led and the many talented people at the office undertook were really valuable. They really made a difference in a lot of people’s lives,” he said. “I think it would be a loss if the size of the office was reduced. In fact, I think it should continue to grow even bigger. I would like to see it expand and I would like to have a robust group of examiners and patent judges here in Colorado.”

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