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Q&A With Crowell's Jeff Snyder

Law360, New York (September 10, 2009) -- Jeffrey L. Snyder heads the Crowell & Moring LLP's international trade practice group in the firm's Washington office. Clients seek him out for troubleshooting and problem solving in cross-border transactions.

With clients in industries such as chemical, electronics, pharmaceuticals, software, insurance, investment, and general trading, Snyder advises on export controls and sanctions, customs law, trade remedies and other international trade laws. Jeff builds teams across specialties and practices, including teaming with C&M International, Crowell's affiliated international trade consultancy.

Q: What attracted you to your practice area?

A: My father was a career USAID officer and I grew up overseas, challenged to understand the wide disparity in economic conditions around the world. As I studied these issues I became intrigued with international economic law, and began to see the role that law, particularly trade liberalization, played in development and growth. As I learned that lawyers could assist companies growing their business and enhancing globalization, I was drawn to international trade law.

Q: What is the most challenging case you've worked on, and why?

A: Much of my work is not public. Companies under investigation for possible violations of the Customs or export or sanctions laws do not seek publicity. Regulations in this area are intentionally vague and often little guidance is available from the agency or elsewhere. Deadlines are impossible. Steering a company through such shoals can be difficult because it requires a combination of knowledge, experience and service. It is very rewarding, but yes, challenging.

Q: What are the most challenging legal problems currently facing clients in your practice area?

A: Globalization without liberalization of nation-based trade and investment restrictions. The conflicts created by global operations but different country rules is a daily challenge. Despite the WTO, a proliferation of free trade agreements, and other liberalizing initiatives, national rules differ from country to country and are not going away anytime soon.

Q: How do you see your practice area evolving in the next five years?

A: Traditional areas — customs, export controls and trade remedies — will continue in importance for global companies, supplemented by new areas, including FTA and WTO issues such as investment and intellectual

property. Successful lawyers in this area will be able to effectively integrate advice in all of these areas and counsel global companies.

Q: Outside your own firm, name one lawyer who's impressed you and tell us why.

A: John Barker at Arnold & Porter. John is a tremendous lawyer who has not forgotten how to be a gentleman and counselor. His knowledge and experience are offered with a light touch that makes his impact that much more powerful.

Q: What advice would you give to a young lawyer interested in getting into your practice area?

A: Find ways to demonstrate your interest, enthusiasm, and passion for the area. Read everything you can (CIT opinions, ITC determinations, export penalty settlements, WTO panel reports); become an expert in something you like. Become involved in bar and trade association activities. Write, speak and write some more. Team up with senior lawyers to write and gain exposure. Build a network of others interested and work together to gain experience.