

Taking Off

Alumna helps lead effort to take Wichita-based company global.

By Angela Lutz

As general counsel at Textron Financial Corporation, **Laura Ice, '84**, has traveled all over the world – but she conducts most of her international business from her office in Wichita, Kansas. During her 23 years with Textron, she's helped to oversee a global expansion that has touched at least 85 countries. Her successful career serves as a prime example of how a lawyer's influence can span the globe while staying anchored in the Midwest.

“When I started at Textron, we were financing aircrafts in Brazil, Mexico, Canada, and Central America,” Ice said. “Since then, we're everywhere – and we're expanding still. Country by country, little by little, we've moved out into the world.”

With headquarters in Wichita and a global finance team, Textron Financial Corporation provides financing opportunities for customers purchasing Textron products, primarily Bell and Textron Aviation - Cessna, Beechcraft, and Hawker - aircraft. In her role, Ice works with domestic and international clients to structure a loan or lease that complies with specific legal standards and protects the company's interests. Two decades ago she was the second lawyer hired by Textron, and two years ago she became the company's first female general counsel.

A Fourth-Generation Lawyer

While Ice seems right at home in the legal and financial world, she didn't always want to be a lawyer. As an English major, her first career choice was secondary education – but law school was always on her radar, and after a year of teaching high school, she decided to take a chance and apply to Washburn University School of Law.

“I grew up in Newton, Kansas, and I'm a fourth generation lawyer,” she said. “I think that's what motivated me. Even while teaching high school, law school was always in the back of my mind – I just didn't feel confident that I would be good at it. But I went ahead and applied, and Washburn accepted me.”

At Washburn, Ice's self-assurance grew as she made lasting memories with lifelong friends, including her two roommates,

who helped her de-ice her car so she could make it to take a final exam one winter morning. She also found Washburn's professors fun and inspiring as she learned how to transfer her skills as a writer to a legal career.

“Attending law school at Washburn gave me more confidence that I could be a lawyer,” Ice said. “At Washburn I learned how to write like a lawyer and not like an English major. They provided a supportive environment. I'm still friends with people in my class. Lots of them are practicing in Wichita or Topeka. It's a nice network.”

Taking Flight in the Aviation Industry

After graduating from Washburn, Ice spent 13 years in private practice and became a partner at Adams Jones Law Firm in Wichita, where she focused on real estate, banking, oil and gas, and commercial work. In this position, she put her law school knowledge into practice and learned how to take a commonsense, client-centered approach to solving problems. Then she decided to take another chance.

“There was a notice that Cessna Finance Corporation, now known as Textron Financial Corporation, was looking to add a lawyer,” she said. “I thought that sounded interesting. I had no aircraft experience at the time, but I had commercial experience, which goes hand in hand. So I applied, and I was the second lawyer they hired.”

When Ice came onboard at Textron, the company was primed for expansion. Ice's job was to carry out the specifics. When the company had a financing opportunity in a new country, she would find a lawyer there and explore how best to structure a transaction. Though international legal systems can be complex and varied, Ice considers dealing with international lawyers the most rewarding part of her career.

“We all have the same problems, we all have the same hopes, and we all have the same dreams,” she said. “One time I met with our lawyer in Romania and we were having dinner, and we started talking about music. I had played the violin growing up and she played the piano. We started talking about our favorite



Laura Ice, '84. Photo submitted

composers, and she said, 'Isn't that something – you grew up in free America, I grew up in communist Romania, and we played and listened to the same music.'

Overcoming Challenges and Staying Connected

Over the last year, Ice has faced numerous professional difficulties related to the COVID-19 pandemic that have also been shared around the world. She has been general counsel at Textron for two years, and more than half of that time has been hampered by coronavirus restrictions. The pandemic caused numerous business disruptions around the world in many industries – though technology provided one silver lining for Ice, who conducts a lot of her business over the phone.

“In the last year since COVID hit, we’ve started doing a lot more videoconferencing, so I could see my lawyers face to face and talk to them more directly,” she said. “Still, the last year has

been challenging, and I’m hoping we’re at the end of that tunnel.”

In difficult times, Ice considers herself lucky to have an extended professional network that can provide support. In addition to staying connected with her former classmates, she has also remained involved with Washburn. She serves on the law school’s board of governors and Washburn University Alumni Association and Foundation board of trustees, and she has donated to the building fund and the Business and Transactional Law Center.

“Washburn gave me my career, and I want other people to have the chance that I had,” she said. “When I think about my time at Washburn, I smile. I remember the friendships and the experiences. Law school is difficult, but the people in law school were great friends. I’m very glad I had the opportunity to go to Washburn. It laid the foundation for where I am now.”