

Munger Partner to Head Women Lawyer's Group

By Amanda Becker
Daily Journal Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES — Katherine M. Forster, a partner in the labor and employment department at Munger, Tolles & Olson, will be installed tonight as the new president of the Women Lawyer's Association of Los Angeles during its annual awards dinner at the Omni Hotel.

Forster's newest role will be the latest in a string of association and committee positions she has held since joining the group as a summer associate.

Forster was going into her third year at USC Gould School of Law when Munger partner Kathleen McDowell invited her to join the association's reproductive rights committee for a meeting in the firm's conference room.

Since that day, Forster, 38, has never looked back. She was a student liason during her last year of law school and she co-chaired the reproductive rights committee before ascending through the association's executive leadership positions.

"It is truly an impressive group of women," Forster said. "It really made an impression on me."

Assisting the group is Forster's main goal as president.

The association's joint task force with the Los Angeles County Bar Association will host a summit in November on the retention and promotion of women lawyers. The daylong event, with panels, breakout sessions and a keynote speaker, is designed to target firm leadership. The theme will be the advancement of women in the legal profession — and why it matters.

"We're not going to advocate that there is one way to get this done," Forster said. "The whole point of the summit is that you need to find out what works with your law firm's culture."

That Forster is advocating for a new generation of women attorneys is fitting, colleagues at Munger say. She has a reputation at the firm for advising and mentoring young lawyers.

"She's high energy but not high maintenance," McDowell said. "New attorneys are drawn to her."



ROBERT LEVINS / Daily Journal

"It is truly an impressive group of women," said Katherine M. Forster, the new president of the Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles, a group she joined while still in law school.

McDowell points to Forster's career before law school as one of the reasons for her legal success. In addition to ability and talent, her quick ascent to Munger's partnership, McDowell said, can be attributed to "her insight into how the real world works."

Forster was a project manager in the aerospace industry after graduating from Princeton with a degree in politics. The decision to attend USC and uproot her husband, Greg Wortman, a luthier and musician, was not without risk.

"A tendency, especially for women, is to be averse to risk," Forster said. "I thought very carefully about what I wanted."

But Forster says her story is proof that a personal gamble can pay great dividends. In her previous

career, once she was past the learning curve, the intellectual challenge ended. Her legal practice and bar association activities offer continual challenge.

"My brain gets its regular exercise now," Forster said. "I feel more connected to the community and the world as a larger place."

In addition to the elevation of the association's executive officers, the reception, titled "Forging Paths Ahead," will honor Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Lee Smalley Edmon with the Ernestine Stahlhut Award; Bet Tzedek's Director of Litigation Michelle Williams Court with the Distinguished Service Award; and the Deloitte accounting firm with the Myra Bradwell Award for its influence on women's initiatives.

amanda_becker@dailyjournal.com