

LOS ANGELES

# Daily Journal

WEDNESDAY,  
APRIL 23, 2008  
VOL. 121 NO. 77  
\$ 3.00

— SINCE 1888 —

© 2008 Daily Journal Corporation. All Rights Reserved



ROBERT LEVINS / Daily Journal

O'Melveny & Myers' new managing partner Carla Christofferson is also co-owner of the Los Angeles Sparks. She's an ace bow hunter, a former Miss North Dakota and has dated Eddie Van Halen.

## Not Your Typical Managing Partner

### Colleagues Call Her a Role Model for Women in the Law Profession

By Maya Meinert  
Daily Journal Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES — How many managing partners of a major law firm grow up on a sheep farm, win a beauty contest, date a rock star, own a women's professional basketball team and are featured in *Vogue* wearing a Halston gown — after intentionally burning down the house she grew up in?

That would be just the one.

Carla Christofferson. In February, she became the newly installed managing partner of the

downtown Los Angeles office of O'Melveny & Myers, the oldest and most prestigious law firm in the city. At 40, she's one of the youngest lawyers to ever hold such a position at the firm.

But there's more.

Christofferson is also co-owner of the Women's National Basketball Association team, the Los Angeles Sparks. She's an ace bow hunter and a former Miss North Dakota. And she dated rock star Eddie Van Halen.

With diversity such a hot topic in the legal community today, hav-

ing an attorney as diverse — and accomplished — in as many areas as Christofferson is an asset to any firm. So is having one with such spirit.

"I think I bring some gumption, which is maybe different from most lawyers," Christofferson said. "I'm definitely not conservative or play-it-safe. It may make some people uncomfortable."

"I've never been an aggressive, pound-the-table lawyer at all. But I do think I bring something different. I'm not sure it's related to

See Page 4 — NOT

# Not Your Typical Law Firm Managing Partner

Continued from page 1

gender. I think it's good for people to see someone different in that role, be it a woman, be it a diverse attorney. I think that's good for the more junior attorneys to see."

Before becoming managing partner, Christofferson spent two years as the firm's talent development partner. She also served as a member of O'Melveny's Office of the Chair, the firm's five-attorney executive committee, and as the firm's national hiring partner.

In her latest role as office head, Christofferson plans to focus on raising the firm's profile in the community by encouraging junior lawyers to join the boards of local organizations.

She also plans on improving quality of life within the firm.

A self-described risk-taker, Christofferson said one of her goals is to try something new each month. So far, she said, she's got the firm to think about bringing in a tailor and starting a yoga class at the office. She said she wants to make her colleagues' lives easier, and she is looking for ideas from everyone.

Dawn Sestito, counsel in the firm's Los Angeles litigation department and who works with Christofferson, said she thinks the tailor is a great idea.

"I must have five pairs of pants in my closet that I can't wear because I haven't had time [to have them tailored]," Sestito said. "It's the little things that really make a difference."

"Carla really cares about the firm, and more than just the firm, she cares about the people within the firm," Sestito said. "To her, it's not just an entity. This is a group of individuals."

Christofferson said she wants to create an environment where "yes" is assumed more than "no."

"The more we can encourage people to try their ideas — and recognize that if they don't work out, it doesn't matter — the better," she said. "It's more important to try new things. In order to continue to compete and attract the best talent, I think it's just imperative that we have an environment where people feel like they can affect change."

That feeling seems to be taking hold.

The office's associates have started their own monthly happy hour, and the office just went to casual Fridays at its attorneys'

suggestions. And Christa Demeke, counsel in O'Melveny's litigation group, started an independent women's basketball team for the firm, something close to Christofferson's heart.

Christofferson and Kathy Goodman, a former Katten Muchin Rosenman attorney, bought the Los Angeles Sparks in 2006 from Los Angeles Lakers owner Jerry Buss. Goodman, who also founded the production company Intermedia Films, now works as a high school teacher. Both Christofferson and Goodman were fans and season ticket-holders who decided they could do a better job of running the team.

"[Kathy and I] would always say to each other, 'If we owned the team, we would do this, do that,'" Christofferson said. "We saw the team as an undervalued asset. We were being entrepreneurial, getting in on the ground floor with something we were so passionate about."

After years of talking about it, Christofferson said, she realized the only thing holding them back from buying the team was themselves.

"It was a lesson in getting out of your own way," she said. "It's better to try than to get to the end of your life saying, 'I wish I had tried more things.' The worst that could happen was they would say no."

With help from investors, Christofferson and Goodman raised \$10 million to become the first women ever to own a professional sports franchise, without the financial support of a husband or father. The team recently acquired No. 1 draft pick, Candace Parker.

The youngest of five children of North Dakota sheep farmers, who lived without running water until the year she was born, Christofferson was the first in her family to attend college. To earn scholarship money, she reluctantly entered beauty pageants and earned the title of Miss North Dakota USA in 1989.

That same year, Christofferson graduated from the University of North Dakota. She scrapped an idea of becoming a journalist, she said, and instead applied to 10 law schools, just to see what would

happen.

She was accepted at Yale Law School, among others, and instead of visiting the campuses before making a decision, Christofferson jumped into her mother's pickup truck and drove to New Haven. She said she had never stepped foot in an office building until she began interviewing for jobs.

**'I'm definitely not conservative or play-it-safe.'**

**Carla Christofferson,**  
O'Melveny & Myers

Christofferson attributes her willingness to try just about anything to growing up "not knowing how to do anything."

"Anything I did was something I'd never tried before or had never imagined trying or had any role model," she said. "Because I didn't have any expectations and no one had any of me, it just made

it less scary.

"Becoming office head was no different than going to Yale Law School.

They were equally foreign. I had no idea how to do either. The nice thing is, because I don't have any preconceived notions, sometimes I try things that are probably a little more innovative."

While still at Yale, Christofferson worked as a summer associate in O'Melveny's Century City office. After graduating in 1992, she clerked for U.S. District Court Judge W. Matthew Byrne Jr. in Los Angeles for a year, then rejoined O'Melveny. She spent 12 years in the firm's Century City office, becoming partner in 2001. She has been with the downtown office for the last three years.

During her tenure with the firm, Christofferson has worked on the 13-year Winnie the Pooh royalty dispute between Stephen Slesinger Inc. and the Walt Disney Co. O'Melveny represented Disney. *Slesinger v. Walt Disney*, B178340. She also spent five years working on a real estate tax shelter case for PricewaterhouseCoopers that originated in the 1980s.

"Carla started working with me when she came to the firm, and she worked continuously with me until she made partner," said Linda Smith, a Century City partner in the business trial and litigation practice group.

"I've seen the evolution of a lawyer from an inexperienced first-year to a highly experienced,

extremely able lawyer," said Smith, whom Christofferson cites as one of her mentors. "Carla has that spark, which elevates someone from an excellent lawyer to a great lawyer. It's a combination of a charismatic personality and a great analytical mind."

Last year, Christofferson led an O'Melveny team in successfully defending Monrovia-based grocery store chain Trader Joe's in a \$9 million lawsuit against a former vendor, Marcie's Inc., that sold produce to the stores from Mexican grower Martinez & Sons.

Marcie's had sued Trader Joe's after the grocer broke off its relationship with Marcie's and started buying directly from Martinez. The complaint targeted Martinez for breach of contract and Trader Joe's for inducing the breach and interfering with the contract.

The trial lasted a month, and after two weeks of deliberation, the jury found Trader Joe's not liable for either contract claim. *Marcie's Inc. v. Martinez & Sons*, BC325177 (L.A. Super. Ct., verdict Aug. 16, 2007).

Christofferson also just wrapped up an administrative trial before a committee of Alaska state officials for ExxonMobil. She currently is working on a matter related to the 1991 settlement ExxonMobil made with state and federal governments after the Exxon Valdez oil spill.

Smith said the fact that Christofferson is a woman in such a visible leadership position, along with all her other accomplishments, will help show younger attorneys that achieving such status is possible.

"There really aren't a lot of role models for women in the law," Smith said. "Men can look at a lot of male partners. But, if you're a woman, you have to really invent yourself, and I think Carla has done that. I've been a force in her creation of herself, but at the end of the day, she is entirely unique."

Christofferson credits the O'Melveny lawyers, including Smith and Los Angeles partner Kathryn Sanders, for giving her the opportunity to shine.

"I feel a tremendous obligation not to now fall down and to continue that same trend and same culture," Christofferson said. "I didn't get to where I was without all the people at O'Melveny who helped me along. So, I have that same obligation to now turn around, extend my hand and pull others along."

Jennifer Laser, counsel in the firm's Century City office, names Christofferson as one of her mentors.

"She makes you feel important and treats your opinion with respect," said Laser, who worked with Christofferson on the Trader Joe's case. "She's open to sharing you with the client and with other partners, making you feel like an important part of the team.

"She's very selfless. If she has the opportunity, she always puts me up to take the credit. You never get the blame if something bad happens, and you get the credit if something good happens. That's rare."

Christofferson likens her litigation style to playing team sports.

"You put together a team," she said. "You play by a set of rules. You go out, and you try your best to completely destroy the other side — you know, to win.

"The thing is, if you play by the rules, at the end of the day, you generally shake hands with the other side and go your separate ways because you both know you're doing the best for your client, and you're trying to win the case."

Two years ago, Christofferson went back to her hometown of Tolna, N.D., which had a population of 202 in 2000, to celebrate the town's centennial and to take care of some business.

The house where she had grown up had been abandoned and fallen into disrepair.

As an act of regeneration and rebirth, just as farmers burn their fields to encourage regrowth, Christofferson decided to perform a last rite. In front of a group of friends and family, including her mother, she burned her old childhood homestead to the ground.

She said she "thought it would be fun," adding, "nobody thought it was odd back home."

The act was symbolic of her life's philosophy.

"In a culture where conformity is really valued, wanting to do something different is not something that's encouraged," Christofferson said.

"So the fact that [my sisters and I] did manage to leave and to have good, successful lives, it was more of a celebration," she said of the act.

"It was more of the Phoenix rising. To me, it was more of a symbolism of rising and survival and succeeding than anything else.

"And it was a really good excuse to have a party."