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Supercounsel

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New WLALA Chief Proves 'You Really Can Have It All'

By Anne Marie Ruff
Daily Journal Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES — Jennifer Landau is a female success story. She is a big-firm partner with a busy litigation practice, a wife, the mother of two young boys, and the new president of the Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles.

"I am an example for people that you really can have it all," Landau said.

Landau, a litigator and partner at Sidley Austin in Los Angeles, will be installed as president at Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles' awards and installation dinner Wednesday.

Along with hard work, intelligence and lots of energy, Landau credits her success to her firm's woman-friendly policies and the mentoring and support she has received from other women.

Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles is the largest and oldest women's bar organization in the city, with slightly more than 900 current members. Landau acknowledges that while the membership has grown 40 percent in the last year, it is still a small portion of the 17,000 practicing female lawyers in Los Angeles.

She aims to make the organization one that women will consider "a must" to belong to, "an old girls or rather a new ladies' network" to rival the proverbial old boys' network.

Linda Peterson, a Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles past president and partner at Sidley Austin, said, "a lot of young women coming out of law school these days think the battle is over, but there are still a lot of issues that you need this organization for."

Landau, who was introduced to Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles by

Peterson in 1998, agreed.

"A lot of the initial barriers to access to the profession are gone," she said, referring to the fact that nearly half of all U.S. law school graduates are women.

"But my agenda is focusing on continuing to promote the retention and advancement of women lawyers."

Nationally, only 17 percent of firm partners are women, 15.4 percent of Fortune 500 general counsel are women, and approximately a quarter of judges are women.

Part of that barrier is mastering a work-life balance because women are still traditionally the caregivers, according to Susan Steinhäuser, a longtime Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles member and president of the Los Angeles County Law Library.

"We find women will stay in a firm about seven years and leave when they start to have children," Steinhäuser said.

That same pressure can make it difficult to join an organization like Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles, she said.

"So we are doing more to show the value of the group," she said.

Landau highlighted the upcoming rain-maker workshop, a seminar with general counsels from leading corporations about how to get on their preferred provider lists, in addition to the monthly "how to" programs the organization is offering this year.

Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles also has a history of advocating for reproductive rights and choice. Steinhäuser said, "It is amazing to me that we still need a pro-choice committee," but she pointed to Proposition 85, which requires a waiting period and parental notification before terminating a pregnancy, and the need to be "ever vigilant about our civil rights."

Steinhäuser said Landau is a wonderful



ANNE MARIE RUFF / Daily Journal

"A lot of the initial barriers to access to the profession are gone," Sidley Austin partner Jennifer Landau said. "But my agenda is focusing on continuing to promote the retention and advancement of women lawyers."

example of a woman moving into a leadership position with the help of her mentor, Peterson, and in turn sharing that opportunity with others.

"Jennifer is very gracious and has opened up her home for women's retreats," Steinhäuser said.

"It shows you how you really can do it, with the children's toys in one part of the house and 40 women lawyers in the other.

"It sounds so hackneyed, but it really was so empowering to hear about all of the talents and skills that were available in that network."

Landau is a graduate of Amherst College and the University of Chicago Law School.

She has defended financial institutions and credit card companies in consumer fraud and other complex litigation, including some of the largest class actions filed in U.S. courts involving tens of millions of putative class members and billions of dollars in alleged damages.

At Sidley Austin, she has worked within her firm to promote women, sitting on the recruitment and diversity committees. She believes the firm's impressive figure of 30 percent female partners, and an informal office survey showing nearly half of the women attorneys raising children reflect women and family friendly practices that

she can draw upon in her work with Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles.

Dominique Shelton, Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles' outgoing president, said, "Jennifer will be a wonderful leader. With her dedication, commitment and energy, WLALA has much to look forward to in the coming year."

Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles sponsors a number of pro bono projects, and this year the group will be honoring Antonia Hernandez, President and Chief Executive Officer of the California Community Foundation; Warner Brothers Entertainment; and Meredith Blake, Executive Vice President of Participant Foundation.