



Emerging Leader

Mintz partner breaks glass ceiling

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In late October, Mintz Levin partner Nancy Adams became just the sixth woman to hold an executive officer position in the 67-year history of the national Chartered Property Casualty Underwriters Society.

Adams, a former prosecutor who tried hundreds of cases and argued before the Supreme Judicial Court while still in her early 20s, came to Mintz Levin in 1999 and was named partner in 2008. She works with insurance carriers as well as major corporate clients, often handling litigation — including class actions — and with a growing practice in the area of directors and officers liability insurance. Her journey to the executive ranks of the CPCU Society began eight years ago when she began to pursue her CPCU designation, which requires passing eight rigorous exams on a range of topics, from macroeconomics to statutory accounting. Adams was elected secretary of the society at its annual meeting in Las Vegas.

“There’s still something of a glass ceiling there,” she said, adding that there also are abundant opportunities to break through. “There’s a lot of reasons why women have not been elevated to that level in the past. I’m pleased to serve in this capacity and can hopefully be a role model for other women.”

The challenge of diversifying insurance — including by age, as the profession works to attract young talent — is one of the issues Adams hopes to help address as she begins her first year as an executive of the 25,000-member society.

A native of the Midwest, Adams has made the Boston area her adopted home since law school and has also found a home at Mintz Levin, which she said blends the resources of a large law firm with the feel of a smaller one. “I love what I do and I love it here,” she said.

What are your top three goals for the year?

My first would be given my leadership role in the CPCU Society to recognize and anticipate the various challenges facing the insurance industry. I want to be able to identify key strategies for our members so we can stay ahead of the curve. We have an industry that is aging and will see a number of retirements in the next number of years that will decrease the intellectual capital. I also want to continue to further grow and develop my practice, and I want to find ways to continue to give back to the industry through teaching, mentoring and problem solving. I want to be an example for others.

What are your guiding principles for good management?

Be efficient, timely and relevant. Add value. And if it's a litigation matter, develop an early exit strategy and revisit it often.

What is the best business decision you've made?

Obtaining my CPCU designation. There are not many lawyers who have that designation, and it has provided me with a senior management opportunity and access to a strong network of people who I can call upon and who have shown commitment to the industry itself. I always say it's extremely, extremely valuable to know the answer to questions but equally valuable to know who to call if you don't know the answer.

What is the toughest business decision you've made?

The decision to stay in Massachusetts after law school. I was born and raised in the Kansas City area and pretty much my whole family is still in Missouri. It was difficult then and now to have family that far away, but I love Boston and love the East Coast.

Do you have a motto you follow in business or in life?

Do whatever it takes. It applies professionally as well as personally.

Who were or are your mentors?

I have had two. Frank Harrison was my debate coach at Trinity University. He was a lawyer and a former member of Congress and he helped guide me through the law school process and my early years as a lawyer. The other, more contemporary one is Kim Marrkand, who chairs our firm's insurance and reinsurance group. She took an interest in my career and has offered invaluable advice about my clients, firm life and guidance on a range of topics.

What is your overall view of the Boston area as a place to do business?

I think it's terrific. It's entrepreneurial, it's cutting edge, it's sophisticated. There's a lot of thought leadership here with the various universities. And even though there are a number of law schools and lawyers in the city, the legal community is still a relatively small and tightknit one.

What are your civic passions and how do you give back?

I'm on the advisory council of the Boston Debate League, which works with the Boston Public Schools to improve educational outcomes through after-school programs. Kids who participate in the programs are 42 percent more likely to graduate from high school and among black urban males, that figure is 70 percent. I've seen a number of kids who were going to drop out or had dropped out who turned to debate and are now going to college. It's a terrific program.

What is the most influential book you've read?

The current president of the CPCU recommended "Race for Relevance," by Harrison Coerver and Mary Byers. It talks about how an organization can be relevant in today's technological

world with all these time commitments and demands all the specialized organization there are out there and stay relevant and necessary.

What is your favorite restaurant?

PJ's Country House in Scituate.

What's on your iPod?

Lots of music, ranging from Nancy Griffith to Vince Gill to Frank Sinatra, and I'll even admit to some Taylor Swift being on there.

What's your favorite getaway spot?

That's easy. Poland, Maine. My family has a camp on Tripp Lake, and I spend a lot of time in the summer sitting on the porch watching the loons and ducks.