

# Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

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## Power lunches

### Female managing partners booking bigger reservations

BY ROY STROM

*Law Bulletin staff writer*

At their first meeting in September 2011, they gathered in a cozy booth at 312 Chicago, a restaurant on Clark and Randolph streets.

In March, they had a private room and long table at McCormick & Schmick's on Wacker Drive.

One day, a group of Chicago's female managing partners who meet for quarterly lunches hope to fill an entire restaurant.

This under-the-radar affinity group for female law firm leaders doesn't have a name. Members gauge its size as between 13 and 16 lawyers. It's been informal from the start, when Segal, McCambridge, Singer & Mahoney Ltd. managing shareholder Kathleen M. McDonough introduced herself via e-mail to Locke, Lord LLP Chicago office managing partner Jennifer A. Kenedy.

Kenedy then introduced McDonough to Nancy S. Gerrie, then-office managing partner at McDermott, Will & Emery LLP, and Susan C. Levy, Jenner & Block LLP's managing partner at the time. Those four had the initial lunch meeting in 2011.

"We thought it was such a wonderful thing that there were other female managing partners," McDonough said. "But at the same time, we sort of lamented the fact that we could all fit in one booth at a restaurant."

The group has no charter or goals other than for its members to be sounding boards for one another and to enjoy a lunch every three months with other women who have accomplished what is — as it's always been in

law firms — a rare feat.

Less than 20 percent of equity partners at AmLaw 200 firms are women, a National Association of Women Lawyers survey reported this year. It is a virtual certainty that the level of female managing partners at those firms is even smaller. That's despite women comprising more than 40 percent of law school graduates since the 1980s, NAWL says.

Kenedy, who became office managing partner in 2010, said at the time she didn't realize how rare it was for a woman to be an office managing partner.

Then the letters came.

Women lawyers from around the city wrote e-mails and sent notes congratulating her on the position and expressing their excitement that a mother in her early 40s was heading a major Chicago office.

"It made me realize that this was something that was rare," Kenedy said. "And then I started focusing on it ... And obviously women have different challenges in industries that are historically led by men. But I think that's changing. And I think the way this group has grown really reflects those changes in a very positive way."

In addition to the original four, the group members are Nicole Nehama Auerbach, a founding partner of Valorem Law Group; Janet M. Garetto, office managing partner of Nixon, Peabody LLP; Tia C. Ghattas, office managing partner at Cozen, O'Connor; Jane M. McFetridge, office managing shareholder at Jackson, Lewis P.C.; Amy B. Manning, office managing partner at McGuireWoods LLP; Meredith Martin Addy, office managing partner at Steptoe & Johnson LLP; Jennifer Ries-Buntain, office managing partner at Hall, Prangle and Schoonveld LLC; Mary G. Wilson, office managing partner at Dentons; and Christina L. Martini, vice chair of DLA Piper's Chicago intellectual property practice and a member



**Kathleen M. McDonough**



**Jennifer A. Kenedy**



**Janet M. Garetto**



**Meredith Martin Addy**

of the firm's executive committee.

To be sure, the growth of the group doesn't signal equality in the managing partner ranks.

The group said it is open to new members, but it does not have an outreach function that would, say, host networking events or provide mentorship for younger women lawyers.

Members do that individually. And they agreed mentorship and inclusion are crucial for increasing the ranks of women equity partners and managers.

"Part of the reason that each of the respective members took on the roles that they took on within their firms and how we found one another is we like to help other female lawyers within our respective firms succeed," said Nixon, Peabody's Garetto.

One way to promote that success, McDonough said, is to bring a diverse group of lawyers

to client pitches and allow them opportunities to develop client relationships.

Then, let the chips fall where they may.

"If you have a female associate who is very important to a client and ultimately has their own book of business, that's how you succeed," McDonough said. "You're not beholden to someone who may or may not give you that book of business the next year."

Steptoe & Johnson's Addy agreed that developing business is important in order to get ahead.

But she faulted law firms in general for historically not coaching lawyers — men or women — on their networking skills. She said the approach by law firms has often been either "you have it or you figure it out." That needs to change for both men and women.

“I don’t want someone to cater to me. I want to be treated like the male partner next door,” Addy said. “And if you treat me differently, we’ll never be equal.”

“I don’t reserve my mentoring for women. But you have to teach

people to do this. And for some, it does come naturally. For some, it’s learned.”

For Kenedy, the lunch group itself is a powerful reminder to young female lawyers that they can have successful careers that lead to management within pow-

erful firms.

“I think part of the reason I got those letters — and I remember thinking about it at the time — is they saw themselves in me,” Kenedy said, referring to the congratulatory notes she received in 2010.

“I have three kids. I have all the demands on me that they have on them. And they saw me in this position. That’s inspiring to them, but it’s inspiring to me too. And when this group gets together, that’s sort of the magic of it.”