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Influential Women 2020 Amanda Harris

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By Roxana Popescu



Tom Kurtz/Special to The Daily Transcript

Partner, Solomon Ward Seidenwurm & Smith LLP.

Harris gets calls from people asking if she can recommend a Mandarin-speaking family lawyer. The question frustrates her, not because she is Korean-American, but because her answer is no.

She wishes she could tell them yes, but there aren't enough litigators who are fluent in Mandarin, she said.

In fact, the ranks of both Asian-American and female litigators are equally thin.

Harris has been working to change that through the Pan Asian Lawyers of San Diego and the Korean American Bar Association of San Diego. Her long-term vision: improve the access of women and Asian-Americans to the legal profession, particularly in big firms and in litigation. While there has been progress, "there is still a lot to be done," she said.

A partner with Solomon Ward Seidenwurm & Smith specializing in family law, Harris chose the specialty because she wanted to advocate for children. In one such case, she helped a father recover custody of his child after the mother traveled to the U.S. from Singapore with the child without the father's permission.

"You have to really want to help people. I think that's where you start," she said, sharing her keys to success. "Then you have to work hard and show up. Volunteer, be in the right place at the right time. Finally, be resilient in the face of uncertainty — even if you're a perfectionist — and learn to manage client expectations."

When two great lawyers square off, someone still loses, she said. "No matter how much you prepare, you could never really predict what's going to happen, and there's always some surprise."

Harris' interest in being a child advocate has led her to volunteer with the San Diego Youth Symphony and Conservatory.