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## Hanson Bridgett, a Likely Am Law 200 Addition, Appoints First Female MP

Kristina Lawson, who has been a partner at the firm for three years, says she hopes to bring her experience serving the public, as a city council member and mayor of Walnut Creek, to her new leadership position.

By Samantha Stokes

After nearly two decades, midsize California firm Hanson Bridgett has a new managing partner, who will be its first female leader. And it's bringing a relatively new voice into the role, selecting a partner who joined the firm as a lateral hire in 2017.

The firm has elected Kristina Lawson, leader of its real estate and environment section, as the new managing partner, Hanson Bridgett announced Thursday. She will take over for longtime managing partner Andrew Giacomini, who has led the firm since 2002, and will be the first woman to lead the 60-year-old firm.

Hanson Bridgett had more than \$114 million in revenue last year, according to preliminary financial data reported to ALM Intelligence, making it a likely Am Law 200 law firm. With 164 lawyers, its revenue per lawyer is competitive with that of many law firms in the upper half of the Am Law Second Hundred, and several in the Am Law 100.

"I'm honored to join the growing number of female managing partners and executives, although frankly, I hope someday it won't be noteworthy," Lawson said in an interview. "That being said, what



(Photo: Jason Doiry/ALM)

Kristina Lawson, managing partner of Hanson Bridgett, in San Francisco.

most excites me about being the first female managing partner at Hanson Bridgett is the message it sends to attorneys and staff: that anything is possible at the firm."

Lawson previously practiced at Manatt, Phelps & Phillips and has years of leadership experience outside of law firms as well. She is currently a member of the Medical Board of California and served as mayor and council member of Walnut Creek from 2010 to 2014.

"The outside leadership experiences I've had have given me a window into the myriad types of issues facing Californians and California companies," she said. "Hanson Bridgett is a microcosm of California, and our practices are uniquely Californian. My visibility

into various issues is maybe different than a lawyer without my experience, and I'm looking forward to bringing that outside knowledge into the position."

Giacomini, the outgoing managing partner, said the firm was doing well financially, and it made sense to transition leadership at a time of strong performance.

The firm reported \$114,094,000 in gross revenue in 2019, its third year in a row of record financial performance, according to Giacomini.

Its revenue per lawyer was \$696,000, net income was \$42.15 million and profits per equity partner were \$629,000.

Hanson Bridgett's head count had been growing steadily since 2015, but it declined slightly in

2020. The firm had 166 attorneys in 2018, according to The National Law Journal's 2019 NLJ 500 ranking of firms based on lawyer head count, and the firm reported its 2019 head count as 164.

Giacomini said the firm didn't have a growth strategy and wasn't trying to achieve a certain head count, nor did the California firm have any national or international growth ambitions or merger plans in the works.

The firm has been able to cut costs with its dynamic work force initiative, which is meant to give attorneys and staff the flexibility to work wherever they want, he explained. As a result, it downsized its office in downtown San Francisco by a floor and increased its space in the suburbs, where lawyers and staff live, by a lesser amount.

Giacomini said Hanson Bridgett's success during the last few years was in line with the economy, which has also been doing well.

### **'We Trust Her'**

After an in-depth, nine-month selection process that accounted for the perspectives of everyone at the firm, Giacomini said Lawson emerged as the clear choice to lead Hanson Bridgett to further success and praised her natural leadership skills, which were even more impressive given she joined the firm only three years ago.

"We've had enough time with her, we know who she is, and we know what she stands for," he said. "We trust her. She's oriented towards other people, she's a natural leader and she has a track record of successful leadership, both inside and outside the legal profession."

Indeed, Giacomini said that during the selection process, the length of time Lawson had been with Hanson Bridgett was a concern—one that Lawson shared early in the process.

"When the [selection] process initially kicked off last spring, in my first call to Andrew I asked, 'Is this even something I could consider putting my name in the hat for?' because I had only been here for such a short period of time," Lawson said. His answer: "absolutely."

"That speaks to the culture of opportunity and possibility that he and the firm have created and that has been fostered," she said.

Giacomini said the firm quickly quieted those concerns, deciding Lawson's leadership skills and the value she added to her practice group made her the best candidate for the job.

"Inside our firm, in a very short period of time, she was adding all this value," he said. "With a new leader, there is an opportunity to see things through a new lens as you look forward. That's super refreshing, and I think that's what this is going to be."

The firm said Lawson's election to its top leadership position is only the most recent example of the firm's commitment to diversity. The firm ranked ninth on the NLJ 500 Women's Scorecard and 24th on The American Lawyer's 2019 diversity scorecard.

According to the firm, 46% of Hanson Bridgett's attorneys are women, and the partnership is 40% female.

Additionally, according to a recent internal pay equity study, the pay disparity between male and female

partners at Hanson Bridgett is less than 1%. Additionally, in the last two years, eight of the nine attorneys promoted to partner have been women.

Over the course of the year, Lawson and Giacomini will work in tandem as Lawson transitions into her new leadership role and Giacomini slowly steps down.

Lawson said she's already identified some gaps in various practice groups and will work to round out expertise at the firm to provide more services in-house. And she is developing a "2021 and beyond" strategic plan to start her tenure as managing partner on the right foot, she said, which includes continuing things the firm is doing well, and "doubling down in California."

"We're a California firm, and we recently acquired a team in LA. We're continuing conversations about expanding deeper into California and throughout the state," she said. "That's probably the thing I'm most excited about: helping this firm continue to grow and thrive."

In all, Lawson said she hopes her leadership style—which she describes as fostering opportunity and possibility for everyone—will support Hanson Bridgett attorneys, staff and clients alike in achieving their goals.

"My philosophy as a leader is lifting others up," she said. In a law firm, she said, that comes down to asking, "How can attorneys be successful, and how can our clients succeed?"

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