

Profile of Charity Kenyon: Successful Lawyer, Mentor, And Community Activist

By: *Shama Mesiwala, Vice-Chair Judicial and Other Appointments*

In August, Charity Kenyon -- long-time WLS member and Frances Newell Carr Achievement Award winner -- was selected as a Northern California "Super Lawyer" for the sixth time in a row. It is one of the many awards Charity has received for her success as a lawyer, mentor, and community activist. In a conversation over lunch, Charity shared how her career developed and what advice she has for attorneys beginning their careers.

Charity came to our region in the 1970's to attend King Hall at UC Davis for its emphasis on public interest law. After working for Diepenbrock, Wulff, Plant & Hannegan in Sacramento as a law student, the firm hired her as their second woman lawyer. The advantages of a big firm, as Charity saw it, were good assignments, experienced mentors, and introductions to good clients. One of her first assignments was to defend a Sacramento Union reporter who had been subpoenaed to testify in a criminal case. Soon thereafter, Time Magazine was sued for defamation, and she defended her successful summary judgment in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Her news media clients grew to include KOVR, KXTV, The Sacramento Bee, and others. Media work led to appeals, and as her name appeared on more published cases, her book of business grew.

Shortly after joining Diepenbrock, Charity became a member of WLS, where Frances Newell Carr, Karen Stevens, Maggie Roth, and Virginia Mueller "took [her] under their wings" and "showed [her] the ropes." Although the number of women attorneys was small, Charity felt fortunate to practice in Sacramento, where state service allowed women litigators to achieve positions of prominence.

Charity rose to partner and then managing partner at Diepenbrock, where she developed a national reputation as a media and First Amendment lawyer. She secured a number of

published appellate victories in cases involving the media's access to court records and proceedings, reporter shield laws, and libel and defamation suits. She also continued mentoring women lawyers both inside and outside the firm, and actively participating in WLS and California Women Lawyers.

After 22 years at Diepenbrock, Charity went into practice for herself with a group of her former partners. In 2007, she joined Bill Yeates to form Kenyon Yeates LLP, which emphasizes First Amendment, appellate, environmental, and land use law.

She still focuses primarily on appellate advocacy and enjoys the ability to select cases she believes are meritorious, can be successfully defended, or raise legal issues of first impression. She continues her work as community leader, activist, and mentor in her roles as President of the California Academy of Appellate Lawyers, founding member of the Schwartz-Levi Inn of Court at UC Davis, and leader in Sacramento's Slow Food Convivium. She and husband Mike Eaton tend to five acres of fruits and vegetables — enough to feed themselves and to donate.

When asked about advice she would give to new lawyers, Charity offers the following thoughts. Be involved in the community, confident in your abilities, and contribute to what needs to be changed. In her view, young associates often sit at a desk with their nose to grindstone, generating billable hours as directed. When they look up, all they have to show for it is a scab on their nose; no one outside the firm knows them. Young lawyers need to develop connections to those around them, pursue work in which they are interested, and think broadly about their careers and community. It is these forces that helped shaped Charity's career and for which she continues to be duly recognized.



Charity Kenyon