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LAW FIRM BUSINESS

Kirkland corporate architect moves to Winston

Based in LA, Eva Davis will head the firm's West Coast private equity practice

By Kylie Reynolds
Daily Journal Staff Writer

The partner who launched Kirkland & Ellis LLP's Los Angeles corporate practice nearly 15 years ago has decamped to Winston & Strawn LLP.

Eva H. Davis joined Winston's Los Angeles office Monday as head of its West Coast private equity practice. Davis said she wanted a firm with lower rates and alternative fee arrangements for her middle-market private equity clients.

"I was looking for a platform where I could really provide value through cost-effective legal services ... and to go to a place that's focused on middle-market transactions," she said. "I feel Winston is that place."

Davis focuses on mergers and acquisitions, private equity and corporate finance. She recently represented music technology developer Line 6 Inc. in its December sale to Yamaha Corp. She said she expects to bring most of her clients to Winston.

Her addition is part of Winston's more than yearlong effort to grow its West Coast offices, particularly in the corporate space. The feat isn't always easy in litigation-focused Los Angeles, L.A. managing partner Eric E. Sagerman said, but corporate hires like Davis are a step in the right direction.

"We are extremely pleased to have someone of her caliber leading our efforts on the West Coast," Sagerman said. "L.A. is a difficult market, a difficult terrain, but we are building something."

Corporate laterals are hard to come by, and it's all the more significant if the partner is coming from Kirkland, which has a top private equity practice, legal consultant Peter Zeughauser said.

"Someone like [Davis] is a big move," Zeughauser said, "especially in L.A., but even any place."

A Kirkland spokesman said, "We wish Eva well in her new role."

Sagerman noted that there's been a spike in the number of women attorneys who have come on board as part of Winston's expansion in California. Including Davis, 21 of the 39 attorneys hired in the last 18 months have been women, according to data from the firm. Winston didn't set out with specific goals about hiring women attorneys in California, Sagerman said, but the growth is consistent with the firm's diversity efforts.

"To get that many women attorneys is a lot. It's a big deal," Zeughauser said.

As a practice leader, Davis plans to focus on representing middle-market private equity funds and their portfolio companies in transactions across Winston's Los Angeles, San

Francisco and Palo Alto offices. She also hopes to steer the practice toward providing outside general counsel services to many of those portfolio companies.

The practice will be a West Coast complement to the private equity work already being done in the firm's East Coast offices, she added.

"The key reason I came to Winston is because of its existing work with middle-market private equity funds in Chicago and New York," Davis said. "That experience got me comfortable that the firm had the platform to support my practice."

It's not Davis' first try at growing a corporate practice. When she arrived at Kirkland from Latham & Watkins LLP in 1999, she was the first corporate partner west of Chicago, she said. She played a part in nearly all of the hiring for Los Angeles' corporate practice, which has since grown to 19 attorneys.

"It's not too dissimilar from what I was tasked with 15 years ago, and I'm excited to do it again," she said.

Legal recruiter Larry Watanabe, who represented Davis in the deal alongside Watanabe Nason LLC partner Ken Schwartz, said Davis was one of his most highly sought after clients in recent memory.

"It's a key acquisition," Watanabe said. "There was a lot of competition."