

# Daily Journal

COVER STORY

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2005

## TOP 75 WOMEN LITIGATORS

### Editor's Note

This week, we celebrate the achievements of some of the state's top women litigators. Two years ago, we honored 30. Last year, we honored 50. This year, we're honoring 75 lawyers whose courtroom prowess would distinguish them in any crowd.

Litigators are considered the toughest among lawyers. For now, it seems worth-while and necessary to highlight that women litigators can be every bit as aggressive, savvy and accomplished as their male colleagues.

But it won't be long before we look back on this list as the expression of an antiquated stage in the development of the legal profession and our society.

These lawyers' achievements speak for themselves. But how did they learn the skills and determination they bring to their clients and into the courtroom?

We asked our honorees about their mentors. They told us about lawyers and judges, male and female, their fathers and mothers, their French teachers, who guided them, offering encouragement, criticism and practical counsel.

In the course of our reporting, we discovered what rich, diverse experiences these lawyers bring from the world outside into the courtroom. Among the 75 lawyers is a former rocket scientist and a former punk rock band manager. The group includes a former opera singer, a Napa Valley restaurant owner and a magazine editor.

But it was the practice of law that eventually drew their passion and their intellects.

When they turned to the law, they often found powerful mentors to help guide them through a profession that hasn't been the most encouraging place for women.

In Homer's "The Odyssey," Mentor is the name of the old man who serves as a trusted adviser to Odysseus. But the key mentoring role in "The Odyssey" is played by Athena, the female goddess of justice, war and the arts. She appears in disguise as the old man in order that Odysseus and his son will accept her advice.

We are delighted to offer our readers this comprehensive portrait of the state's most prominent women litigators. These women don't have to don any disguises to get their wise counsel taken seriously.

### Gail Ellen Lees

Los Angeles

### Place of birth:

Philadelphia

### Law school: UCLA

School of Law

### Law firm: Gibson,

Dunn & Crutcher

### Practice area: Class-

action defense

**Recent big case:** She has led Gibson Dunn's response to the changing nature of class actions after the passage in November of Proposition 64, which reformed the state's Unfair Competition Law. To date, the firm has won nine dis-



missals of these cases and lost none. General Mills recently picked her to defend class actions on both coasts challenging various marketing and labeling practices.

### People would be surprised to know

**that:** "I was editor of a magazine in Newport Beach called New Worlds Magazine that was the predecessor of today's Orange Coast Magazine."

### Mentor:

Litigation partner Wayne Smith. "He included me in beauty contests for new class-action matters and always encouraged the clients to view us as equals, with the result that two significant clients returned to me with high-exposure class actions to run on my own when I was still a very new partner (with a lower

billing rate than Wayne's)."

**Mentoring:** "I make efforts to mentor associates in two categories: One, there are usually one or two associates who do a lot of work in my area, and I try to find opportunities where they can gain visibility outside the firm and with clients. Two, I try to pay special attention to one or two women litigation associates, usually people for whom I have served as a buddy in the summer program or have been involved in recruiting, by having lunch with them from time to time to check in on how they are doing, whether they are getting the type of work they are most interested in, whether they have any problems we should address."

— Drew Combs