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Bartko law firm opens LA office and names new leaders

By Wisdom Howell

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San Francisco based Bartko, Zankel, Bunzel & Miller PC celebrated the opening of its Los Angeles office and a new, diverse leadership group at a reception this week, ushering in a new era for the business trials, labor, employment and real estate transaction firm as it approaches five decades of practice.

An Nguyen Ruda, co-chair of the labor and employment practice group who often counsels companies in collective bargaining negotiations, was elected by her colleagues to join Robert H. Bunzel as co-managing principal of the firm almost three years after joining the firm.

“For a firm that’s been around this long to have a 45-year-old refugee from Vietnam show up and take the lead is pretty revolutionary,” she said in an interview during the celebration on Monday. “Rob Bunzel really sold me on the place. He told me, ‘You don’t take someone like you and give them a bunch of rules. You take someone like you, tell them there’s no rules, and see what you can do.’”

Ruda’s first order of business was to call up her friend and colleague Karen E. Pointer — a seasoned employment law attorney who spent more than two decades running her own firm, Lerman & Pointer LLP — to take over as principal of Bartko’s new Los Angeles operation.

“My path to Bartko was picking up the phone,” Pointer joked. “I’ve had my own firm for 23 years and was just winding down because my partner transitioned to a full-time mediator. An mediated with my partner and when he told her



From left: Karen Pointer, Rob Bunzel and An Nguyen Ruda of Bartko Zankel Bunzel Miller | Gary Wagner / Special to the Daily Journal

about his transition she called and said I should join the firm. I met her opposite on a case and have a lot of respect for her. There’s a lot of synergy in our work ethic and the vision we have for running a firm.”

Ruda, who left Vietnam as a refugee at 5, and Pointer, an African American woman from Los Angeles, reflected on the value of having women of color in high ranking leadership positions. They said they want to use their platforms to make diversity a hallmark of Bartko’s mission and mentor the next generation of lawyers.

“I think it’s very important that people see women that look like

Karen and I in the top leadership positions; not just a leadership position but the top leadership position,” Ruda said. “As lawyers, and those in private practice, generally, the women and the minorities hit a ceiling that is very difficult to break through. Everybody says they want to hire women and minorities and promote women minorities. Why are the diversity figures for equity partners so poor? Why are they so skewed towards white men still, right? Because it is an investment to get here.”

Pointer pointed out the practical benefits of law firms having a diverse staff of attorneys, especially in employment law.

“Our clients are diverse so you want people who speak their language, communicate with them, and are able to offer them good guidance in that regard,” Pointer said. “Many companies are now adding diversity, equity, and inclusion departments where they’re really trying to focus on diversity. Some of them are doing it expertly by bringing in people that know what they’re training them about and others are doing it a bit haphazardly. Our position is to help guide them in that area so we model that here at the firm.”

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