

# PORTLAND BUSINESS JOURNAL

## THE LIST

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## Shiau Yen Chin-Dennis

MANAGING PARTNER - PORTLAND OFFICE,  
K&L GATES

**U**pon ending his eight-year term as managing partner of K&L Gates's Portland office, Brendan Gutierrez McDonnell praised his replacement this way.

"Shiau Yen is a natural born leader," McDonnell said of Shiau Yen Chin-Dennis, who assumed the role in March. "In addition to managing her large international corporate practice, she brings her vision, strategy, compassion, gratefulness and selflessness to work every day. She treats our lawyers and staff with equal respect and dignity."

Those attorneys and staffers reciprocate in kind, praising Chin-Dennis for such traits as her foresight on law technology as well as her ability to "lead for generations." She discusses both qualities below in an edited version of this interview.

**What were some of last year's big developments in Portland law?** There's the consolidation of law firms, which you've reported on. This is in fact happening nationally and globally, and it's a trend that's happened before, as firms need bigger platforms: You need to either go bigger or be more boutique and more specialized. K&L Gates saw this a long time ago, with our merger (Preston Gates & Ellis became K&L Gates in 2007).

**I remember that being a big deal.** It was Bill Gates' father's firm, Bill Gates Sr. The firm launched Microsoft. There's a lot of history here.

The other trend is that law firms are rapidly increasing their diversity and inclusion (staffers). It's a good trend, and it's changing other industries as well, including Oregon's tech industry. We've come a long way with it in the Portland market, and D&I is part of our DNA. We continue to make major strides in it: If you look at our website, you'll see how many female partners and diverse lawyers we have (note: K&L Gates ranked 15th in 2019 in terms of its percentage of female and minority attorneys among law firms with fewer than 20 local attorneys). That's important because we track generational changes, and the new attorneys coming in have very different views about D&I. They believe it's a foundational value as opposed to just an initiative.

**What do you expect in the coming year?** Law is tied to business, to business trends and to our economy. To that end, the technology piece is affecting the legal industry so much. So law firms increasingly need to become technology companies. We're looking to use (artificial intelligence) to help us be much more efficient and effective.

**How would you use AI?** We use it for due diligence for (mergers and acquisitions), for instance. Legal tech has become a booming business.



**The intersection between law and tech has obviously become very different than it was 10 years ago, when far fewer firms embraced things like AI.** You either embrace it or, well, you may not be around. I came from a tech company before I joined a law firm, and (Gutierrez McDonnell) has a tech background as well. Both of us feel like the industry is finally moving toward the way we think. Using AI as a way to do due diligence doesn't mean you don't have the human interaction anymore. It means instead of having 10 people to go through 1,000 documents, we now may only need one-and-a-half. And that translates into efficiency and lower costs for our clients.

**What's the Portland office's role in the K&L Gates universe?** The Portland office is like the incubator for our firm because we like trying different software platforms. And that's attractive to the new generation of attorneys. I think about this all the time: It's all about how we lead for generations. You have the Boomers, you have Generation X. And the Millennials and Generation Z are very technologically savvy. They like to have the right tools to solve problems.

**What else should Portland businesses expect in the next decade?** You're going to see a lot of merger and acquisition activities as they plan for succession. Many businesses won't have their sons or daughters or whoever to take over, and as Boomers want to retire, M&A activity will be pretty active.

Plus, in 2020, we'll have the election, which always affects law.

- Andy Giegerich