

Meet Smith Dollar's Diane Aqui, a 2019 North Bay Women in Business winner

Learn more about Diane Aqui, partner of Smith Dollar PC in Santa Rosa. She is one of North Bay Business Journal's Women in Business Awards winners for 2019.



Diane Aqui, partner, Smith Dollar PC, Santa Rosa, is a 2019 winner of North Bay Business Journal's Women in Business Awards. (courtesy photo)

North Bay Business Journal asked 2019 Women in Business Awards winner Diane Aqui to fill us in on her background, responsibilities and community involvement, and insights into what makes her a notable professional in the region.

Professional background: Leads the Labor and Employment Division at Smith Dollar. She represents employers before numerous federal and state administrative agencies such as the National Labor Relations Board, Workers Compensation Appeals Board, Labor Commissioner, Department of Fair Employment and Housing, and Cal-OHSA.

Education: Empire College School of Law, Santa Rosa, Juris Doctorate, Magna Cum Laude, May 2001;

State University of New York Maritime College, New York, New York, bachelor of engineering in Marine Engineering, May 1986.

Staff: Stephanie Abbott has been Aqui's legal assistant and right hand for the last five years. Without Stephanie, Diane would miss deadlines, forget appointments, and would never have won this award!

Tell us about yourself and your company: Aqui graduated as valedictorian of Empire Law School in 2001 and was the recipient of numerous Witkin and American Jurisprudence Awards. She is a member of Sonoma County Women in Law and volunteers with Legal Aid of Sonoma County and other local community organizations.

She is also an Administrative Hearing Officer for the City of Santa Rosa and City of Petaluma Code Enforcement Departments, and volunteers as a settlement conference panelist at Sonoma County Superior Court. She is admitted to practice in all courts of the State of California, Northern District and Eastern District Federal Court, United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit and the D.C. Circuit.

Prior to attending law school, Aqui was an engineer for 11 years, graduated from Maritime College, the New York State Merchant Marine Academy, with a Third Assistant Engineer's License, sailed on oil tankers up and down the Mississippi river, and was the first female boiler inspector for the State of Hawaii.

She is a partner at Smith Dollar PC headquartered in California's Wine Country. The firm focuses on financial services, real estate, business, employment, wills, trusts, probate and personal injury.

Diane Aqui

Attorney and partner

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Read more profiles of 2019 North Bay Women in Business Awards winners:

nbbj.news/wib2019

Is there a major accomplishment in the past year or so that you would like to share?

Coached a Girls on the Run team at Kid Street Charter School (Girls on the Run meets twice per week throughout the school year and combines life skills lessons to 3rd-6th grade girls with running activities and training for a 5K race).

What is the achievement you are most proud of?

Traveling to Washington, D.C. and arguing a labor law case before the DC Circuit Court of Appeal.
What is your biggest challenge today?

Finding balance between career and family/downtime.

Words that best describe you: Wickedly smart and witty; hardworking and resourceful.

As a successful female professional, what were the biggest obstacles you faced and how did you overcome them?

Of course the biggest obstacles that women, including myself, face in the workplace has always been just being a woman and the inequality that goes with that, and also having children and raising a family. Overcoming those obstacles includes being confident, learning to speak up and overcoming our tendency to be perfectionists.

How do you think your profession will change in the next five years?

Over the last few years, I have noticed a continuing erosion of respectful civil conduct between lawyers. This has been commented upon by many in the legal profession, including the bench and the bar associations. I think (and hope) that similar to the #MeToo movement, that there will be a continuing backlash against poor behavior, and we will see the return of professionalism and civility.

Who was your most important mentor?

I actually have two.

When I was a brand new lawyer, and working for the Public Defender's office, I worked with a very experienced attorney, Ralph Lopez, in the criminal misdemeanor department. Ralph was extremely patient and gracious with me, and he taught me that there is no mistake made that can't be fixed. Going to court every morning and being so nervous to even speak out loud (and say the wrong thing), it was very positive to have Ralph next to me and feel his grace.

Attorney Mark Jordan, who I practiced with for seven years until he passed away, was my other mentor. He taught me everything I know about labor law. The day after he passed away, I burst out crying during labor negotiations with the Teamster's union, and I could hear his voice in my head saying, “Counselor, be tough!”.

What advice would you give to a young woman entering your profession or the work world today?

I'm going to borrow this advice from my 20-year-old daughter who is currently at Humboldt State and majoring in race and gender studies: “Take no bull sh--.”

Typical day at the office: There is no typical day. Every day is different.

Current reading: “The Hour I First Believed” by Wally Lamb

Most want to meet: Bruno Mars

Social media you most use: Other than LinkedIn, which I haven't checked in months, I don't.

Stress relievers: Reading and playing pool

Favorite hobbies: Reading, planning trips and traveling

What would parents or significant others say if asked to brag about you?

Strong, true to her word, good speller (came in second place in the 4th grade county-wide spelling bee), ability to be non partial while understanding other's strengths and weaknesses, stoic in the face of crisis, generous, tactful but encouraging

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