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Stradley Ronon's Long Beach leap fueled by culture, not geography

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By David Houston
Daily Journal Editor-in-Chief

When Philadelphia-based Stradley Ronon Stevens & Young LLP opened its Long Beach office a year ago, the move wasn't driven by geography. The century-old firm found a group of attorneys whose practice and culture aligned with its own - and they happened to be in California.

"It really started with people," Michael D. O'Mara, managing partner of Stradley Ronon, explained in an interview. "Once we met Esther [Cho], Neal [Robb], and the rest of their team, it became clear this was the right move."

Esther E. Cho, partner-in-charge in Long Beach, was one of the five partners who transitioned from Keesal, Young & Logan in April 2024. She echoed that sentiment.

"We had been practicing together for over 20 years and knew that wherever we landed next, culture had to be the right fit," she said. With children growing up and a desire to offer clients broader services, Cho said she began to look for a firm with complementary strengths and national reach. "Stradley had everything we were looking for: a strong reputation, especially in financial services, and people who matched our values."



MICHAEL D. O'MARA

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"Before this interview, I had a call with one of my Philadelphia partners who told me, 'It feels like you've been here for years.' I really took that as a compliment," she said.

The West Coast team has quickly immersed itself in firm life across the country, even holding leadership positions. Long Beach partner Melanie L. Ronen, for example, was named chair of Stradley's em-



ESTHER E. CHO

ployment practice, while others, including partner David D. Piper and associate Cheryl Chang, have taken roles in the firm's technology and associate development committees.

Cho described being able to provide her financial services clients a national platform that includes "boots-on-the-ground representation across the country." She recounted how a New York partner stepped in and conducted a deposition for her that saved the client the cost of having Cho travel across the country.

"I never had that before. Now, I do - and it's making a real difference," she said.

East Coast clients have also benefited. O'Mara said that Stradley

has long had West Coast clients but lacked local presence. "Now we can show clients that we're truly national. That's a game-changer," he said.

Now that the tie-up has reached a successful one-year mark, the firm's leaders said they are discussing how they might grow their California footprint.

The Long Beach team are litigators with specialties in financial services and employment law. But the firm has ambitions to build a full-service office in Southern California. "We're purposefully building our new space with room to grow," said Cho, noting that the team expects to move into its permanent office by the end of July.

Growth will be thoughtful. "We're not looking to put pins on a map," O'Mara said. "We want to grow with the right people. That's our model - and it works."

Cho added, "We're excited about the possibilities, especially expanding into regulatory and transactional work. But above all, it has to be a culture fit."

"A lot of firms talk about culture, but for us, culture means people. Esther and her team bring energy, leadership, and values that reflect the best of Stradley. This isn't just an office opening. It's an investment in who we are and who we're becoming," O'Mara concluded.