

## 5 Questions With Chiesa Shahinian's 1st Female Leader

By **Nick Muscavage**

*Law360 (November 1, 2021, 3:47 PM EDT)* -- Chiesa Shahinian & Giantomasi PC has recently named its first female managing member, and she's planning on growing the firm and continuing its path in advancing diversity and inclusion.

Patricia K. Costello, a retired New Jersey Superior Court judge who joined Chiesa Shahinian in 2015, was appointed the firm's new managing member last week. She is the first woman to lead as the firm's executive since its founding in 1972.

She told Law360 Pulse that she intends to use her experience as a judge to expand Chiesa Shahinian, which will celebrate its 50th anniversary next year. Costello is aiming to apply the leadership skills acquired during her tenure as Essex County assignment judge, a position she held for 10 years.

As assignment judge, Costello oversaw the trial and municipal courts in one of the state's busiest vicinages, which handled more than 100,000 filings per year. At the time, the Essex County vicinage had 1,000 employees and a \$55 million annual budget, according to Chiesa Shahinian.

Now as Chiesa Shahinian's managing member, Costello is in charge of a firm with more than \$90 million in revenue, 175 attorneys and 285 employees. Based in West Orange, New Jersey, Chiesa Shahinian has offices in the Garden State and New York.

A graduate of Seton Hall University who received her law degree from Rutgers Law School, Costello was appointed to the bench in 1989 by then-Gov. Thomas Kean. Before ascending to the bench, Costello worked in private practice as a partner in the law firm of McAlevy & Costello.

Law360 Pulse spoke to Costello to find out more about her plans for the firm. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

### **What does this historic promotion mean to you and other female attorneys?**

It is very exciting for me and for the firm. We join a welcome, growing trend of law firms across the country placing women in executive leadership roles — establishing CSG as a trailblazer in this respect and sending a strong signal of our firm's commitment to diversity and inclusivity at the highest ranks. Additionally, the promotion sets an encouraging benchmark for women seeking to rise to leadership roles in our profession. I thank my colleagues at CSG for their tremendous vote of confidence, and I am



Patricia K. Costello

grateful to these early adopter peer firms for helping to steer the practice of law in a continuously progressive, forward-looking direction.

### **What sort of responsibilities will you now be tasked with?**

Beyond managing revenue growth and sustaining the firm's extraordinary momentum overall, I believe the first order of business will undoubtedly be reengaging our workforce as we establish creative, safe, incremental and flexible means of bringing our employees, whether attorneys or administrative staff, back together to something that feels more like the "old normal." We strive, and have achieved all that we have as a firm, because of our culture, which is best nurtured in person. But kindness and empathy are other key elements of what makes CSG a special place, and we will ensure that our people's personal needs are met throughout this process and that they are as comfortable as possible.

### **How do you plan on strengthening the firm?**

In many respects, CSG is still a new law firm, which affords us the opportunity to be nimble and easily pivot in pursuit of intense short- and longer-term goals currently being established with an eye toward the future. Looking ahead, we are giving deep thought and close consideration to succession planning and geographic, revenue and people growth strategies to sustain and surpass our fantastic performance over the past several years. Further, having spent a career squarely focused on mentorship of the next generation of leaders, I would like to institute rigorous professional development programs for all levels of our workforce.

### **How do you think your former role as a Superior Court judge will play into your new role?**

Beyond managing the caseload, budget and employees of Essex County's trial and municipal courts, I believe that one of the key qualities I bring to the table from my judicial experience is active listening and an appetite for lively discussion. Many people within the firm have experience, whether personal or professional, that I don't. And it will be critical to listen and gain a meaningful understanding of their perspectives prior to taking any action. Further, as a judge, you are tasked with listening to all sides and their arguments and using your judgment to sift through this information, evaluate the points and make an informed decision. This will be an immensely valuable skill in navigating this new role.

### **What sort of challenges do you anticipate may arise, and how do you plan to overcome those?**

In the immediate term, the return to office will prove to be a challenge due to our multigenerational workforce and each employee's individualized needs. It will become critical to use our judgment and exhibit compassion as we undertake this endeavor to ensure that our employees feel cared for. Flexibility and understanding will be key here, as with any other business.

--Editing by Orlando Lorenzo.