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Debra Wong Yang

Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP

Los Angeles

Litigation

Debra Wong Yang, who now serves as co-chair of Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP's crisis management practice group, brings to the job a groundbreaking career as the first Asian-American woman appointed to be a U.S.

Attorney — serving the Central District, the largest federal judicial district in the U.S. — and as a former state court judge in Los Angeles.

Today, her office in the Bunker Hill area is close to Yang's roots in the city. "It's a stone's throw from Chinatown," she said, where her mother's father was a community founder and leader and where as a little girl, she went to school and munched shrimp dumplings at local restaurants.

"It's grounding for me to be here and to remember the journey I'm on," Yang said. "When I get a hankering for dim sum, I'll hit one of the old spots. I take great pride in this city and all the cultures represented here."

Yang's work at Gibson Dunn involves critical representations in both high-profile and highly confidential matters for clients like UCLA and the University of California Regents, USC, the Johnson & Johnson board of directors, MGM Resorts and Archer Aviation Inc.

In 2022, she had three major wins. Yang settled an enforcement action by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission against a leading entertainment company, ending a four-year investigation involving a whistleblower's complex financial claims.

"Very wonky accounting details," she said, declining to name the client. "The SEC wanted to claw back funds, but they finally walked away," assessing a small civil penalty but finding no criminal conduct.

She also prevailed for the founder of Auspex Pharmaceuticals, Dr. Sep Sarshar, who was investigated by federal officials for allegedly disclosing insider information shortly before Auspex was acquired by Teva Pharmaceuticals for \$3.5 billion.

Yang took over the case from another firm after charges were brought; her aggressive defense strategy led the court to dismiss the indictment and file a declination of future prosecution. *U.S. v. Sarshar*, 1:21-cr-00202 (S.D. N.Y., filed Aug. 21, 2020).

And Yang scored a major victory for Archer Aviation, a maker of electric vertical take-off and landing aircraft, in a trades secrets case in which a rival alleged a conspiracy to misappropriate its proprietary information. Yang and her team flipped the script, demonstrating the rival's claims were fraudulent and that Archer had developed its own product. The court denied the plaintiff's motion for a preliminary injunction. *Wisk Aero LLC v. Archer Aviation Inc.*, 3:21-cv-02450 (N.D. Cal., filed April 6, 2021).

Yang continues her efforts for a group she co-founded, The Alliance for Asian American Justice, now entering a new phase to encourage prosecutors to file more hate crime charges in suitable cases. And she's started a new podcast focused on successful Asian-American women.

"I'm a crisis manager," she said. "I see problems and find solutions."

— John Roemer