

Breaking the Ice: Ponzi receivership work among ‘honors of my career’

Name: Tara Norgard

Title: Partner, Carlson Caspers

Education: B.A., political science, Marquette University; J.D., University of Minnesota Law School

Carlson Caspers partner Tara Norgard led work to recover millions stolen in Trevor Cook’s \$190-million Ponzi scheme during her decade as general counsel for the receiver.

Clawback efforts, which reportedly recovered \$21.7 million, stretched from the United States to Canada, Panama, Switzerland, Jordan and the United Kingdom, Norgard said. Cook is serving 25 years for mail fraud and tax evasion.

U.S. District Judge Michael Davis appointed Norgard, a former extern, general counsel to the receivership in November 2009. Davis concluded the receivership in January.

“It has been one of the greatest honors of my career to serve the court in that capacity and the people who we were ultimately there to work for, the victims of that scheme,” Norgard said.

The experience made Norgard a better lawyer in her intellectual property and high-stakes business litigation practice, she said, as she became more conversant in different areas of the law.

Q: What’s the best way to start a conversation with you?

A: Tell me something about yourself. I love to be a social person, but I find myself kind of private so I like to hear about other people first.

Q: Why did you study law and pursue it as a career?

A: I was a political science major, so I thought I wanted to be in politics, behind the scenes, policymaking. But I didn’t have the personality for that or the tolerance



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for Washington, D.C. I moved into PR and marketing for a few years. When it was time to settle on a long-term career path, having ruled out the political branches of government, the law was a natural fit.

What books are on your bedside table or e-reader?

A: My son is 12 and my daughter is 14, but we still read together. One I’m reading, with my son, is “It Ain’t So Awful, Falafel.” The other, on the other end of the spectrum, is “Founding Mothers” by Cokie Roberts.

Q: What is a pet peeve of yours?

A: Gum chewing.

Q: What do you like best about your work?

A: I learn something new about the technology and the law every single day. ... And it is a privilege to be in a profession that bears direct responsibility for upholding equal justice under the law.

Q: What do you least like about it?

A: It can be an all-encompassing profession if you let it and can leave little time for other pursuits. But that’s true of many professions.

Q: What do you like doing away from work?

A: I like to be with my husband and my kids. Our kids are entering the pre-teen stage. It’s fascinating and wonderful as they see and participate in the world in new ways. And then, selfishly, I like yoga.

Q: If someone visits you in your hometown, what would you take them to see or do?

A: I grew up in St. Paul, moved away for a long time and my husband and I came back 16 years ago. We take people down the East River Parkway on the St. Paul side then to the West Bank usually taking the Franklin Avenue Bridge and then come up behind Gold Medal Park and the Guthrie.

Q: Is there an attorney or judge, past or present, whom you most admire—and why?

A: The list of those I admire and am grateful for is long. My uncle, Mark Gruesner, is a phenomenal trial lawyer. He’s been in the profession for over 40 years. He has been a steadfast guide and a mentor. I wouldn’t be where I am today without him.

Q: What’s a misconception people have about working as an attorney?

A: The idea that all lawyers are out for themselves and extremely wealthy is misconceived. The vast majority of lawyers I know are, above all else, committed to equal justice under law and dedicate countless hours of their own time to ensure the sanctity of our legal system for all.

Q: What’s your favorite depiction of the law or the legal profession in popular culture?

A: Three letters: “RBG.” End of story.

—Todd Nelson