

Rising Star: Weil Gotshal's Luna Ngan Barrington

By Rachel Scharf

Law360 (June 4, 2021, 3:02 PM EDT) -- Luna Ngan Barrington of Weil Gotshal & Manges LLP has scored trial verdicts saving companies like C&S Wholesale Grocers and Johnson & Johnson from massive damages, earning her a spot among the top trial lawyers under age 40 honored by Law360 Rising Stars.

HER BIGGEST CASE:

Barrington secured a major win for C&S Wholesale Grocers Inc. in multidistrict litigation alleging a price-fixing conspiracy in April 2018. The Weil team defended C&S at trial, where a Minnesota federal jury cleared the grocery business of all counts after just a few hours of deliberation.

Winning this verdict wasn't easy, Barrington said, given the complexity of the antitrust allegations and the bevy of potentially incriminating documents brought by the plaintiffs.

"Distilling the information and getting the jury to understand these really complex economic principles was really important and challenging," she told Law360.

This win, which saved the family-run business from hundreds of millions of dollars in damages, was especially meaningful for Barrington because she'd spent significant time preparing the company's CEO for testimony.

"We directly [helped] this family defeat this major class action that would have really hurt them," she explained. "It really brought a human element to the case and underscored the impact that this case would have on his business, family and legacy."

HER PROUDEST MOMENT:

Alongside the C&S trial win, Barrington counts her pro bono victory for a group of Mexican American students in Tucson,



Luna Ngan Barrington
Weil Gotshal

Age: 36

Home base: New York

Position: Partner

Law school: University of California, Hastings College of the Law

First job after law school: Clerk for Judge Richard M. Berman of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York

Arizona, as one of the proudest moments of her career.

In that 2017 case, an Arizona federal judge held that a state statute banning a Mexican American studies program in Tucson's schools violated the First and 14th Amendments.

Advocating for these students stands out in Barrington's memory because it was clear how much the community valued her work, she said.

"We had parents, students and teachers come and sit every day in the courtroom and watch us," she said. "When one of my partners made the closing arguments, there were tears in the audience. To win and to give them back some of their culture and their pride, that was a moment that I was very proud of."

WHAT MOTIVATES HER:

Barrington is mainly motivated by her family, including her two young daughters and her parents, who are immigrants.

As a first-generation lawyer and the first person in her family to earn a graduate degree, Barrington explained that she's inspired by everything her parents have done to give her the opportunity to practice law.

"Knowing what it took [for my parents] to get me to where I am today, I'm motivated by their sacrifice," she said.

HER OTHER NOTABLE CASES:

In March 2019, Barrington secured a trial win in one of the first bellwether cases in mass tort litigation over alleged asbestos exposure from Johnson & Johnson's talcum powder.

A New Jersey state court jury cleared J&J of any liability after Barrington discovered an alternative causation theory just three weeks before trial: that the plaintiff's cancer could be attributed to an asbestos cement plant he'd grown up less than a mile away from, rather than the company's baby powder.

"We were able to present that theory to the court, and what I think really hurt the plaintiff in this case was that their causation expert had opined that there was nothing that could have caused his cancer other than the baby powder," Barrington explained. "She didn't even know that he had lived near an asbestos plant, so her credibility was basically shot."

She's also currently representing steel giant ArcelorMittal in its antitrust case against the country's rail giants, as part of massive multidistrict litigation accusing them of a scheme to fix fuel surcharge prices.

"I think there are some really interesting, precedent-setting issues that will be developed as a result of this case," Barrington said.

WHY SHE'S A TRIAL ATTORNEY:

Trial lawyers are unique, Barrington said, because they have to be storytellers in addition to legal practitioners, adding that she loves developing stories jurors can relate to. Barrington also enjoys that the work requires her to think on her feet and that cases change nearly every day they are at trial.

"The strategy changes almost constantly depending on what happens at trial the next day," Barrington said. "It's the adrenaline, it's the unpredictability — all that is a lot of fun."

— *As told to Rachel Scharf*

Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2021 Rising Stars winners after reviewing more than 1,400 submissions. Attorneys had to be under 40 as of April 30, 2021, to be eligible for this year's award. This interview has been edited and condensed.