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Mary-Christine “M.C.” Sungaila

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As a veteran Buchalter shareholder and chair of the firm’s appellate practice, Mary-Christine “M.C.” Sungaila is one of a handful of female and Hispanic appellate practice leaders nationwide.

One goal of her new venture, the Portia Project™ Podcast, is to attract the next generation of female lawyers to the field by featuring fireside chats with prominent women judges and lawyers in which they share advice and discuss their career paths.

The show—named for the quick-witted Shakespearean female protagonist who outwits males in court—debuted in February. “I already have a lot of judicial listeners,” she said. “It’s a small audience, but a good one, and I’m getting positive reviews. The greatest compliment is that those interviewed often refer me to others to be interviewed. I have about 50 interviews in production.”

Among them: justices of the supreme courts of Arkansas, Texas and Michigan plus Associate Justice Therese M. Stewart of the 1st District Court of Appeal and Molly Dwyer,

clerk of court at the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

“Molly Dwyer has done everything and knows everything at the court,” Sungaila said. “I started thinking beyond the judges to what you can do with a law degree.”

Sungaila also is an adjunct teacher at Loyola Law School’s 9th Circuit Appellate Clinic and formerly at an appellate advocacy clinic at UC Irvine School of Law. In mid-April, she was prepping her Loyola students for oral argument in an immigration case. “Over ten years we’ve won every clinic case I’ve been involved in,” she said, adding with a laugh, “No pressure on my students, of course.”

In her work at Buchalter, Sungaila is counsel of record for amicus Legal Momentum in a case involving one of Jeffrey Epstein’s serial sexual abuse victims who was denied her right to confer in Epstein’s Southern District of Florida case by the then-U.S. Attorney there. The U.S. Supreme Court denied cert, but the matter inspired Sungaila to lobby in California for a conversion court system to ex-

punge convictions for people who have been trafficked. “So Epstein might lead to something useful,” she said.

Sungaila has had successful outcomes at the 9th Circuit for her client, the city of Costa Mesa, in its battles with sober living home operators over discrimination claims under the Fair Housing Act. Two more appeals by home operators are set for argument.

“These are major wins,” she said. “We hope the court will clarify standards for assessing whether users of drugs and alcohol are disabled when their disability limits major life activities.”

—JOHN ROEMER