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Kirkland attorney balances family and complex commercial litigation

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Christa C. Cottrell's law practice was already complicated before her twin daughters arrived on the scene, just before she was set to go to trial in February 2014.

It was a trial five years in the making. But Cottrell's colleagues at Kirkland & Ellis LLP were supportive of her and her family — Cottrell gave birth to a third baby girl 14 months later, and in both instances, she was able to take a full leave with both pregnancies.

The 39-year-old equity partner handles complex commercial and antitrust litigation. In a written Q&A with the Daily Law Bulletin, the University of Michigan Law School graduate discussed her career, including delving into new industries and taking up the mantle of the longest-running case in Ohio history.

twins arrived two weeks before a trial I had been working toward for five years. While I was disappointed to miss that one, I was able to take my full leave with both pregnancies — with the full support of the firm. In fact, only a few months after I came back from leave, the firm announced I made equity partner. After the craziness of the past few years, I can honestly attest that babies are much harder work than briefs!

CDLB: What do you like about your work as an antitrust lawyer?

Cottrell: With antitrust law, you have to take fairly complex legal concepts and distill them down so that a jury can understand. That's a challenge that I enjoy. I also love learning about new industries. Recently, I have had the opportunity to represent a chicken company, and it's fascinating! It is also, for the record, still my favorite food. Preferably fried.



Christa C. Cottrell

for the plaintiff. After many trials and trips to the court of appeals, the fifth trial resulted in a full victory for Abbott. We spent a long time getting up to speed and working through the many (many) prior records. We immersed ourselves completely in the facts, learning every detail. Ultimately, we won because we had both the facts — and an

and my older sister an elementary school principal. Given what they see and grapple with every day, my family thinks I opted for “easy street” with law! But I knew I wanted to be a lawyer as early as second grade and, in many ways, I see being a lawyer as very similar to being a teacher — the job is to try to simplify, explain and engage.

CDLB: What are your long-term goals for your legal career?

Cottrell: To continue to work on challenging, interesting cases. And perhaps equally important, I hope to be able to provide the same mentorship and guidance to young attorneys that I was fortunate enough to have. I cannot overstate the value of having a trusted mentor's opinion on issues ranging from career advice to whether I need to wear nylons to court. (The answer, by the way, in most jurisdictions is unfortunately “yes.”)

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CDLB: What was it like maintaining your law practice and having three babies in 14 months? Did you have to pull back in any way?

Cottrell: Well, it was a very busy time! We had identical twin girls in February 2014 and a third baby girl 14 months later. I learned there are some things you can't plan around as our

CDLB: The Abbott case [*David Jelinek v. Abbott Laboratories, et al., Case No. 99CVH-09-7505*] you worked on sounds crazy. How did you go from losing after the first trial to winning on the fifth retrial?

Cottrell: That is the longest-running case in Ohio history! The first trial took place 20 years ago and resulted in a full victory

amazing team led by [Kirkland partner] Jim Hurst — on our side.

CDLB: You come from a family of educators. Why didn't you join the family business, so to speak?

Cottrell: Yes, everyone is a teacher! My dad taught high school in Detroit, my younger sister is a middle school teacher

CDLB: What is the first app you use on your smartphone when you wake up in the morning?

Cottrell: Is it cliché to say “Outlook”? It's the truth!

CDLB: What TV show did you just finish binge-watching?

Cottrell: The girls and I binge-watched “The Magic School Bus” on Netflix. After you recommended it, of course!