



2019 RISING STAR

Kelann Stirling

Kelann Stirling of Kirkland & Ellis LLP has advised clients on numerous complex project financings over her career, including on a \$1 billion project that is expected to be the largest natural gas-fired electric power plant in the United States, earning her a spot as one of five project finance attorneys under 40 honored by *Law360* as Rising Stars.

The biggest deals of her career:

One of Stirling's biggest deals just closed last month. With Kirkland partner Rohit Chaudhry, she co-lead a team that advised lenders on the \$1 billion financing for a gas-fired power plant in Guernsey County, Ohio. The project is expected to provide power to 1.5 million homes as the largest natural gas-fired electric power plant in the country.

The project involved a unique hedging arrangement, requiring Stirling to understand every nuance of the financing documents to make sure the client felt protected.

At the end of the deal though, another attorney called Stirling to tell her she did a great job — a rare gesture for attorneys, she said.

"I felt like it was really a great example of what's fun about project financing," she said. "It's really meant to be everybody coming together to figure out how to finance a project, and ultimately if all goes well, it's a win for all parties."

In addition to the Guernsey County project, Stirling said her "absolute lifetime great project" was when she was part of a team at Latham & Watkins LLP that advised on the \$7.4 billion financing for the Cameron LNG

liquefaction-export project in Hackberry, Louisiana.

The deal, which closed in 2014, became such a big part of her life that the other attorneys working on the project joked that she would name her first child Cameron.

Why she's in project finance:

When Stirling was a summer associate at Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom LLP, she wasn't

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sure what kind of law she wanted to practice. She ended up on the project finance team and, after her first project, she said she “never looked back.”

Stirling said the practice appealed to her because it required attorneys to work together rather than against each other.

“The lawyers that I find most effective in this space are very collaborative. Rather than the sort of high of the adversarial kind of pushing and pulling, you get excited about figuring [things] out like, ‘If I move this puzzle piece here, that’ll be a little harder for my client, but ultimately that’s not what they care about. They care about this puzzle piece,’” she said.

Her proudest moment as an attorney:

Stirling said her proudest moment as an attorney was when she gave a talk to law students at her alma mater, Cornell University, about her career path. Seeing her trajectory on paper, she said, prompted her

to call her father afterward and say, “I’m doing it. I’m doing this thing I always wanted to do.”

Stirling, who spent two years as the legal director at InterGen in between stints at Latham, said many people told her she would never go back to private practice when she decided to go in-house. But relaying her story to the law students, she realized they were wrong.

“People have told me [my career path] wasn’t the right one and sitting in that room telling [the students] I was where I wanted to be, I did feel pride,” she said. “I did it my way, and it worked out.”

What motivates her:

Stirling said she is most motivated by the people who she looked up to as a young attorney and the young

attorneys who now look up to her.

Stirling said her mentors “supported those decisions that were not mainstream in terms of what happens at law firms.”

“I always think how I just don’t want to disappoint them, you know, I want to do well,” she said. “I want to back up the support they gave me.”

As she advances to a more senior role, Stirling said, “I feel motivated by the junior people that I’m trying to bring along ... that are looking at me as an example.”

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