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## *The Amalfe Coast*

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# A Sea Change

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In the tumultuous age of #MeToo, employment lawyer Christine Amalfe has the right skills at the right time

BY PATRICK PAWLING PHOTOGRAPHY BY LUIGI CIUFFETELLI



**If you find yourself in the Caldwell ShopRite on any given Sunday and pull your cart up alongside a genial, short-haired blonde woman holding court near the artisanal Italian cheese, feel free to join the conversation.**

Knowing Christine A. Amalfe, the talk will most likely be about the Yankees, how the Syracuse basketball team is looking, Italian cooking, and other odds and ends.

Amalfe, of Gibbons' Newark office, is a nationally respected employment attorney, power broker, trial lawyer, mentor and advocate for women attorneys. She's also a wife, mother, cook, kids'-game attender, traveler, confidant, Twitter devotee, Yankees' enthusiast and friend. She cared for a father who recently died of dementia at 95; she continues to care for her 95-year-old mother.

"She's like a superhero," says Amalfe's daughter Alessandra Moore. "When I was growing up, she never missed any [of my] games. And it wasn't like she would show up and do emails. She was the team mom, plus she cooked a full dinner every night. It's like she's magically able to slow down time to get more done. I think I'm good with time management, but she blows me out of the water."

Moore, a litigation legal assistant in New York City and former Division 1 softball player, remembers a weekend she spent with her mom in Boston before Thanksgiving. Both had worked a long, hard week prior to the getaway, but once settled, their paths parted. Moore quickly cozied up into a nap. Amalfe took the family dog, Max, for a long walk, went Christmas shopping, counseled a friend on the phone "and did nine million other things, all while I was asleep," Moore laughs.

It's her mother's energy, and her ability to seemingly tweak time as a super power, that Moore attributes to Amalfe's fast-tracked career.

In 1993, only eight years out of law school, Amalfe made partner at Gibbons. She currently chairs the firm's employment and labor law department and manages lawyers in three of Gibbons' five offices; her clients include some of the world's best-known companies. She is a member of the firm's executive committee, serves as its human resources general counsel and co-founded the Gibbons Women's Initiative, which earned the Catalyst Award in 2009 for contributions to advance women in business.

When not in trial (the very mention of a good cross-examination lights her up), Amalfe advises clients on federal and state discrimination, family and medical leave, whistleblower issues and wage and hour laws. She also conducts internal investigations of employee discrimination, harassment and other misconduct issues.

At a time when #MeToo has become a rallying cry, Amalfe possesses the right skills and experience at the right time.

"Christine is literally the go-to employment lawyer in New Jersey, especially in these tumultuous times," says Patrick C. Dunican Jr., Gibbons' chairman and managing director. "We have a commitment to the advancement and retention of women here, and Christine has been central in pushing the firm forward. She is tenacious. She doesn't let an issue die. She follows up. Clients call her to deal with sticky issues, and in this #MeToo environment, lawyers like her will be critical to helping clients sort out issues around harassment."

As a longtime lawyer, Amalfe sees #MeToo from a unique vantage point.

"I definitely see two sides. You are dealing in this practice area with people and emotions and human nature," Amalfe says. "You sometimes deal with romance in the workplace. Sometimes there is a consensual affair that ends and one party has trouble letting it go; that may result in a sex harassment claim. You have situations where men are interested in women they work with and ask them out, but instead of the woman saying, no, she is not interested, she makes excuses, which might cause the man to think he has a chance—she didn't want to hurt his feelings. The man continues to pursue, and then there is a sex harassment claim. Sometimes men are totally out of line and engage in bad, unlawful behavior. Sometimes women misinterpret. There are some meritorious claims, and some non-meritorious claims. Each case is different, each situation unique."

Amalfe says while she thinks she's good at figuring out which claims are serious and which aren't, better training protocols would help.

"I always advocate for training so the employees and supervisors better understand what is and what is not sexual harassment and unlawful behavior," she says. "While the claims aren't new, the volume is. [In the wake of #MeToo], we have already seen an uptick in requests for policy updates, complaint hotlines and training from our corporate clients, which



#### CHRISTINE AMALFE

Gibbons

Employment & Labor: Employer;  
Employment Litigation: Defense

Newark

Super Lawyers 2005-2018; Top 10  
2018; Top 100 2007, 2009-2017;  
Top 50 Women 2005-2018

illustrates that corporate America is taking the movement seriously. And they should."

Attorney Don Beshada, who worked as an associate with Amalfe before founding Beshada Farnese, hires outside lawyers on a regular basis.

"She is on the short list of the people I most often call first, especially for labor and employment," he says. "Her style is straightforward. You get objective, honest assessments of the situation, as opposed to her telling you what you want to hear. There aren't any excessive motions. It's about getting to the heart of the issue."

Amalfe grew up in a blue-collar family in Union, New Jersey, where her father owned a tire shop and her mother worked as a secretary until child-rearing became the priority. Her grandmother, who spoke only Italian, shared their home. She continues to inform Amalfe when, for example, she prepares the Feast of Seven Fishes dinner for a crowd of almost 30 on Christmas Eve, or on nights when she's simply lifting chicken parmesan out of the oven for a dinner for four.

Amalfe's mom was the Girl Scout leader, chauffeur and "secret feminist."

"She never went to college and was a stay-

at-home mom, but she always pushed her two daughters to reach for the stars," Amalfe says. "While she couldn't understand why I didn't change my name when I got married, she was always supportive of me getting to the top. She had some liberal points of view for the '60s and '70s."

Roaming the neighborhood, Amalfe played baseball and basketball and pedaled her bike until night fell, all the while dreaming of becoming a sportscaster.

"I liked playing with the big boys and I was always comfortable hanging with men or guys or boys, which probably helped me later on," she says.

A good student, Amalfe commuted to Seton Hall University because the family couldn't afford housing. She waitressed in the summer and, after deciding her marketing degree wasn't likely to spur a lucrative career, she attended Syracuse Law on scholarship. Her first—and only—firm has been Gibbons, where she's practiced for more than 30 years, since a 1984 summer associate job.

"I would say employment law found me instead of me finding employment law," Amalfe says. "It was a great match for my skill set and interests. I always wanted to help women in the workplace, and being able to counsel corporate clients on sound policies and processes, as well as regarding the law, has been rewarding. I help my clients create positive workplaces for women. My long-term clients are very proactive and cutting edge when it comes to policies and practices in the workplace. I would hope I had something to do with that."

In 1997, Amalfe co-founded the Gibbons Women's Initiative, which serves as an integral component of Gibbons' efforts to create a more diverse attorney workforce and leadership team.

"I was reflecting back on [what inspired the founding] since it is our 20th anniversary," she says. "My daughter was 3. I was seeing firsthand the struggle of work-life balance and I really did want to have it all. I did not want to have to choose between a successful career and a family. I believe women can have both, maybe just not on the same day. My firm has made progress in retaining and advancing women and providing an environment where they can practice law and have a fulfilling family life. I think GWI was a big reason for that. Gibbons has several practice group leaders and several women on the executive committee. That really helps create an environment that is supportive of women, but the law profession is not where it needs to be."

Amalfe says she loves working with junior women lawyers, law students and undergrad women in a mentor relationship. "I want to be there as a sounding board to give advice," she says, even though, when she was coming up, she didn't have that experience: Two men served as Amalfe's mentors.

One taught her the art of being a trial lawyer,

and the other helped with the business of law. During her rise from second chair to first chair, from associate to partner, from partner to executive committee member and from group member to practice group leader, they were there to support her.

Not that it was easy. Years ago, when Amalfe was eight months pregnant, the plaintiff in a contentious sexual harassment suit she had deposited accused her of menacing her in a parking lot. "It opened my eyes to how clients feel when they're falsely accused," she says.

Along with her daughter, Alessandra, Amalfe's son, Kyle Moore, 21, is an economics major who may also wind up in law school. Her third child, Sam Moore, 16, plays varsity basketball for Seton Hall Prep.

"I see her greatest achievement as the three children she raised," says Madeline Cox Arleo, U.S. District Judge for the District of New Jersey, who has presided over cases Amalfe has worked on. "They are the kinds of kids you want your kids

to be friends with. She's a worthy role model for young women and I consider her a friend. I've always admired her. She's always joyful—a joyful lawyer. She does it with happiness. There are people who are doers and there are people who talk about doing things. Chris is a doer."

If there is one chink in Amalfe's armor, one place where she can't manipulate time, it's the beach.

"I come over the bridge on Friday in the Atlantic Highlands, and when I get to the top, and you can see the ocean north and south, I feel the calm and slowness only the ocean brings," she says of her drive to the family's ocean-side house in Sea Bright. "There is nothing like that view. There is nothing better than the smell of the ocean. I am always sad to leave on Monday to go back to work. I truly love being there. I stroll along the ocean with our dog, Max, and clear my head."

She adds, "OK, I might be known for sitting on the beach reading briefs and thinking about how best to move my cases along." 

