**OC Retail Keeps Streak**

**Biggest Shopping Centers Post 1.7% Increase, Top $8B in Sales**

By MEDIHA DIMARTINO

The largest shopping centers in Orange County managed a seventh straight year of growth in taxable sales with a 1.7% gain. Retailers, restaurants and entertainment venues at the various centers posted $8.13 billion in sales, based on this week’s Business Journal list, which measures revenue for the 12 months ended June 30.

Twenty-one of 34 centers reported increases, 11 had declines, and data for the remaining two shopping centers was estimated.

The pace of growth declined from last year’s 8.6% increase but nonetheless offered a sign that the grouping of largest centers remained strong enough to offset the departure of longtime entry Laguna Hills Mall from the list.

The mid-market mall—which ranked No. 19 in 2015—had declines, and data for the remaining two shopping centers was estimated.

Based on this week’s Business Journal list, which has a cutoff of $40 million in taxable sales for the 12-month period. The center’s owner, Merlone Geier Partners in San Francisco, had declines, and data for the remaining two shopping centers was estimated.

**Black Belt, Fast Rise**

Zabat-Fran: part of UCI Law School's first graduation class in 2012

By MEDIHA DIMARTINO

Christina Zabat-Fran brought a black belt in taekwondo to an exhibition-quality art portfolio to go with her law degree when she took the job as the in-house counsel at St. John Knits International Inc. in Irvine.

Martial arts training gives her poise during contract negotiations, while the painter in her helps her troubleshoot with St. John’s management, according to Zabat-Fran, who was honored as Rising Star at the Business Journal’s seventh annual General Counsel Awards dinner on Nov. 2 at Hotel Irvine.

“We are not there just to flag what they can’t do,” she said about the legal team’s close collaboration with company logistics and operations units. “We are there to guide them to where they want to go,”

**St. John Knits’ Zabat-Fran Brings Varied Background to General Counsel’s Job**

**Burnham-Ward’s Next Retail Act Set for LB**

**REAL ESTATE:** SOCO developer sees similar potential at Boeing site

By MARK MUELLER

The developer behind the South Coast Collection shopping center in Costa Mesa is gearing up to break ground on a hip retail project near Long Beach Airport.

Newport Beach-based Burnham USA and its Burnham Ward Properties affiliate last month got approval from Long Beach City Council to move forward with the Burnham Ward 73 project near Long Beach Airport.

The center’s owner, Microsemi Corp., hired Bank of Montreal to drum up potential buyers after Skyworks Solutions Inc. expressed interest in the entirety of the business.

**IE Billionaire in Deal For Google Campus in Irvine**

**REAL ESTATE:** Estimated $255M tops for OC office deals since 2012

By MARK MUELLER

A billionaire from the Inland Empire has acquired the five-building office campus in Irvine that holds the local operations of Google Inc. and others in what appears to be the latest office deal in Orange County in several years.

Property records show that an entity controlled by Jack Dangermond—the founder and CEO of Google—has owned the 10-acre campus since 2012.

**Will Shakeup in Chip Sector Include Microsemi?**

**TECHNOLOGY:** Longtime acquirer likely to draw several bidders

By CHRIS CASACCHIA

Another big shake-up could play out soon in Orange County’s chip sector, which has lost several local headquarters over the last few years amid a growing appetite for consolidation.

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Zabat-Fran  

and sometimes that means you have to be creative and come up with some really good solutions.”

Zabat-Fran, a member of University of California-Irvine School of Law’s inaugural class, started at the high-end apparel manufacturer in 2010 as a summer intern. “Growing up here in Orange County, I always knew of St. John, this wonderful, family-owned, luxury clothing company,” she said. “And also as someone who loves fashion, I knew that it’s a global brand. So when the opportunity was posted to learn more about legal practice with the Irvine headquarter, I jumped. It was a three-month engagement, and they wanted me to learn as much as possible about what it’s like to practice law in-house. They never had anyone continue more than a summer — this was not how they recruit.”

The internship, however, continued into her second and third years of law school. She spent her summers drafting licensing agreements and working on major deals right beside our general counsel. “At the end, they decided to create a position for me to work on our board” as manager of legal affairs, she said. Zabat-Fran has since been promoted to general counsel, advising on manufacturing, distribution and retail-related issues. She negotiates and prepares the brand’s commercial contracts, confidential and intellectual license agreements, distribution, supply and vendor arrangements; marketing and technology contracts and real estate leases.

Fashion Sense  

St. John employs about 400 in Irvine and another 600 at a plant in Mexico. The brand’s sales are down substantially from its peak about a decade ago, according to industry sources. It has 230 retail outlets globally, including Neiman Marcus, Saks Fifth Avenue and Nordstrom department stores. St. John operates 35 boutiques and 20 outlet stores of its own.

Marie Gray co-founded the company with husband, Robert, in 1962. Escada AG in Germany paid the Grays $45 million for an 83.5% share in 1989 and took the company public in 1993. New York-based private equity firm Vestar Capital Partners acquired a majority stake in the brand in a 1999 deal that pegged St. John’s value at $522 million and took it private.

Zabat-Fran joined the company full time in 2012, and went to work on a deal with Shanghai-based investment firm Fosun International Ltd., which picked up a 33.3% interest in St. John in late 2013 for $55 million. She also helped President and Chief Executive Bruce Fetter get back on board for his third tour at the OC Mix luxury mall, a move that was prompted by then-Chief Executive Officer Geoffrey van Raemdonck’s departure to Ralph Lauren. Executive Chairman Bernd Beetz served as interim chief executive until Fetter came back in January 2015.

Zabat-Fran managed “several key deals in conjunction with executing the leadership’s brand development strategy” that included taking back its business in China from Heiman, which had operated seven St. John boutiques under a 10-year lease. She also drafted and negotiated agreements to establish St. John’s e-commerce platform last year, an effort that’s “been successful in the past year.”

“Now I’m working closely with our team here to find ways of how we open that platform to even more customers, and marry practices we do on e-commerce with what we do in our boutiques,” Zabat-Fran said. “For example, this summer we looked at how we could better harmonize return and shipping policies, even with cross-border transactions.”

Zabat-Fran is part of a “big Filipino family” who encouraged her to take martial arts classes.

“Helped me build my confidence growing up,” said Zabat-Fran, who won a bronze medal at the World Taekwondo Champion, but also “continues to be a part of your mindset, because thoughtful in how you react. If you are in negotiation for a particular deal, and you’re speaking with opposing counsel or whoever you are negotiating with, martial arts brings you great composure and courage in your position. You can be really graceful in your effectiveness—you don’t have to be in-your-face aggressive in order to get where you want to go.”

OC-born Zabat-Fran has stayed close to her roots, coming a bachelor’s degree in political science and arts and humanities at UCI in 2006. After graduation she worked as a public affairs coordinator for Orange County Clerk Recorder Tom Daly. UCI Law School Dean Erwin Chemerinsky called her in 2009 to join him and “start something new” as the institution got ready for its first class. She not only agreed but also founded UCI School of Law’s Student Bar Association and the Law Review.

Zabat-Fran is chairperson of the Orange County Bar Association’s corporate counsel section. She’s also founder of Filipino-American Lawyers of Orange County and serves as chair of legal counsel for Legal Aid, Public Law Center and California Lawyers for the Arts.