

C POWER PLAYER

BY T.S. PERIC



MARGARET WONG: VELVET OVER STEEL

Don't let her graciousness fool you. This lawyer and activist is tough—and she knows it.

When measuring the accomplishments of Margaret Wai Wong, one fact is inescapable in the equation. She is an immigrant. And the beauty of life's irony is that she, in her chosen specialty of law, repeatedly catches glimpses of her own past through the eyes of her clients.

Wong is Cleveland's top immigration lawyer. Why? "I'm very lucky," she says with typical modesty. But this is modesty with an attitude.

When describing her as one of the best lawyers in town, she interjects without hesitation: "I am *the*

best immigration lawyer." As proof, she points to her inclusion for three consecutive years in a book called "The Best Lawyers."

A committed Liberal Democrat, Wong has been heavily involved in Cleveland's civic scene for years. Her whirlwind of activity is directly attributed to a sense of duty fostered by her parents, especially her mother. "It is a privilege," she says of her civic work.

If life has been uplifting for Wong's spirit, it also has been lucrative for her pocketbook. The Shaker Heights resident is part owner of three restaurants (two Pearl of the Orient locations and La Noodle, formerly the Amethyst Grille), operated by her equally well-known sister, Rose. Her husband, Kam Cham, is a pharmacist who manages three pharmacies.

But neither business nor civic responsibility can interfere with Wednesday Wong night, a weekly gathering of the Wong clan—in-

cluding parents (when they're not spending time in Hong Kong), siblings and children. Here, only Chinese is spoken, and the Wongs enjoy the comfort of family togetherness.

Wong may consider herself lucky, both personally and professionally. But more than a dash of strength has contributed to her good fortune.

Starting her day at 5:45 a.m., sans alarm clock, Wong is in the office by 8 a.m. — after seeing son Steven, 8, off to University School and daughter Allison, 7, to Laurel School. She rarely leaves work before 7 p.m. "I'm very focused and I work very, very hard," she says with nonchalance. "I (might) fail once or twice (at a task), but I'll make it in the end."

Those who know Wong say she typically engulfs herself in everything she does. While she doesn't hesitate to take risks, she is known

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