

Rising Star: Cadwalader's Christopher J. Dickson

By Nathan Hale

Law360 (June 27, 2022, 2:03 PM EDT) -- Christopher J. Dickson of Cadwalader Wickersham & Taft LLP has regularly served as lead counsel to lenders on major transactions, including the \$3 billion securitized refinancing of the recently developed One Vanderbilt skyscraper in New York, earning him a spot among the real estate attorneys under age 40 honored by Law360 as Rising Stars.

THE BIGGEST DEAL OF HIS CAREER:

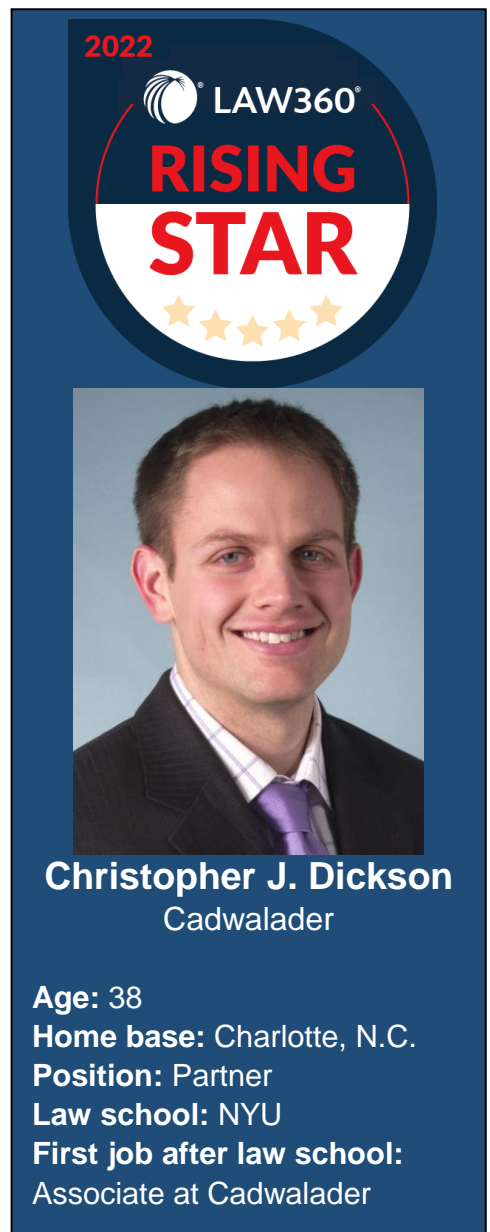
Dickson helped lead a Cadwalader team that advised a syndicate of nine lenders led by Wells Fargo and Goldman Sachs on the One Vanderbilt transaction — the largest fixed-rate refinancing secured by a single asset ever.

Dickson has represented lenders on numerous transactions valued in the billions and hundreds of millions of dollars, but he said this one, which was finalized in June 2021, would be "hard to top."

In addition to requiring extensive coordination between the firm's origination and securitization teams to ensure the lenders could securitize the debt the day after funding the loan, the job also required analysis of the multiple revenue sources within the building, which include not only office space but also an observation deck and world-class dining, Dickson noted.

But it was the timing and context of the deal, coming at a moment when questions were swirling about the viability of Manhattan's office market in a world with COVID-19, that really made it stand out.

"Coming out of the pandemic, there hadn't been a whole lot of demand in the market for office-backed loans. And so it was very refreshing at that time to see there was such demand and the offering of those bonds was so well received," Dickson said. "It was probably one of the first times where I started feeling really confident that we were kind of coming out of the pandemic."



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RISING STAR

Christopher J. Dickson
Cadwalader

Age: 38
Home base: Charlotte, N.C.
Position: Partner
Law school: NYU
First job after law school: Associate at Cadwalader

ON THE OUTLOOK FOR REAL ESTATE AND LEGAL WORK:

Uncertainty about the future of office work is one element of changes underway in the real estate industry and how attorneys provide counsel in that field, Dickson said.

"I think there is a question around how real estate in general will continue to shift," he said, adding that he doesn't see a lot of demand currently in certain areas in the retail and hotel sectors. "I think just given the market in the last two years, that's been a little softer."

Dickson has seen some people trying to apply technology, including artificial intelligence, to replace some of the more "boots-on-the-ground" diligence, such as lease and simple document reviews, currently performed by lawyers and other professionals.

"I think it's both a challenge and an opportunity for the industry, to be honest, because I think there will be ways to leverage technology that will make the services we provide more affordable for our clients," Dickson said. "But the challenge will be figuring out how to integrate that into the practice of law."

WHY HE'S A REAL ESTATE LAWYER:

Dickson, who first worked for Cadwalader as a summer associate in 2007, said he came to the firm aware of its strong reputation for finance work, but he said he found himself drawn to the real estate group because of the opportunity to work on more tangible, identifiable assets.

"If I'm walking around downtown Charlotte or visiting our New York office and seeing buildings that I've had a hand in financing and knowing the inner workings ... it still gives me joy to this day," he said. "It's pretty nerdy, but I still take a bit of pride in that."

Dickson also noted that a summer job he had in college may have given him extra appreciation for the hard work that goes into the projects he's working on.

"I actually, through a friend of mine, worked as an assistant to a surveyor," he said. "I was out in the field helping set up surveys of boundaries of developable land, and I was out there with a metal detector trying to find rebars and mark corners of property."

WHAT MOTIVATES HIM:

Dickson said he draws motivation from a strong work ethic instilled by his grandfathers. One was a first-generation immigrant from Germany, and the other was an orphan who reunited and raised most of his other family members when he was young, Dickson said.

"They had an appreciation and love for education," he said. "They didn't have the ability to go to college, and so I always learned from them what a blessing I had to get the education I did."

"They were also sort of self-made, forced to get by on just grit alone," he added. "And I think I kind of picked that up from them, and it just makes me grateful for the opportunities that I have, and I don't ever want to shortchange the opportunities that they created for me by not working really hard in my career."

THE PROUDEST MOMENT OF HIS CAREER:

That work ethic shined brightly as Dickson achieved what he said has been one of his proudest moments — becoming a partner at Cadwalader at the start of 2020. He said he set his sights on this goal while still in law school at New York University, even though some classmates viewed the firm as a competitive

place where it was very difficult to make it into the partnership.

"But when I was a summer associate here, I just loved the place, loved the work that they did and the people that I got to work with," Dickson said. "So, I think actually getting to make it into the partnership ranks was, you know, the culmination of a lot of hard work and some really good fortune, too. But it was one of the things that I'm definitely the most proud of, not just in my career, but I would say in my life."

— *As told to Nathan Hale*

Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2022 Rising Stars winners after reviewing more than 1,350 submissions. Attorneys had to be under 40 as of April 30, 2022, to be eligible for this year's award. This interview has been edited and condensed.

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