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BUSINESS



REX W. HUPPKE
I Just Work Here

Being harassed is made easier

After 2 Supreme Court rulings, it's more difficult to hold companies liable for workplace harassment

When I daydream, I envision a workplace where people are nice to one another and everyone gets along.

I also envision wearing a jet pack, flying across the city and landing in a Dairy Queen lot where I'm given buckets of free ice cream.

Sadly, it's the second fantasy that's more likely to come true. Workplaces invariably contain non-nice people, including those whose non-niceness rises to the level of harassment.

Thanks to two recent rulings by the U.S. Supreme Court, workplace harassers, and the companies that employ them, are more likely to get away with making people miserable.

Generally, it's easier for employees to hold companies liable for harassment if the harasser is a supervisor. It's a higher bar for a company to be liable for behavior among co-workers.

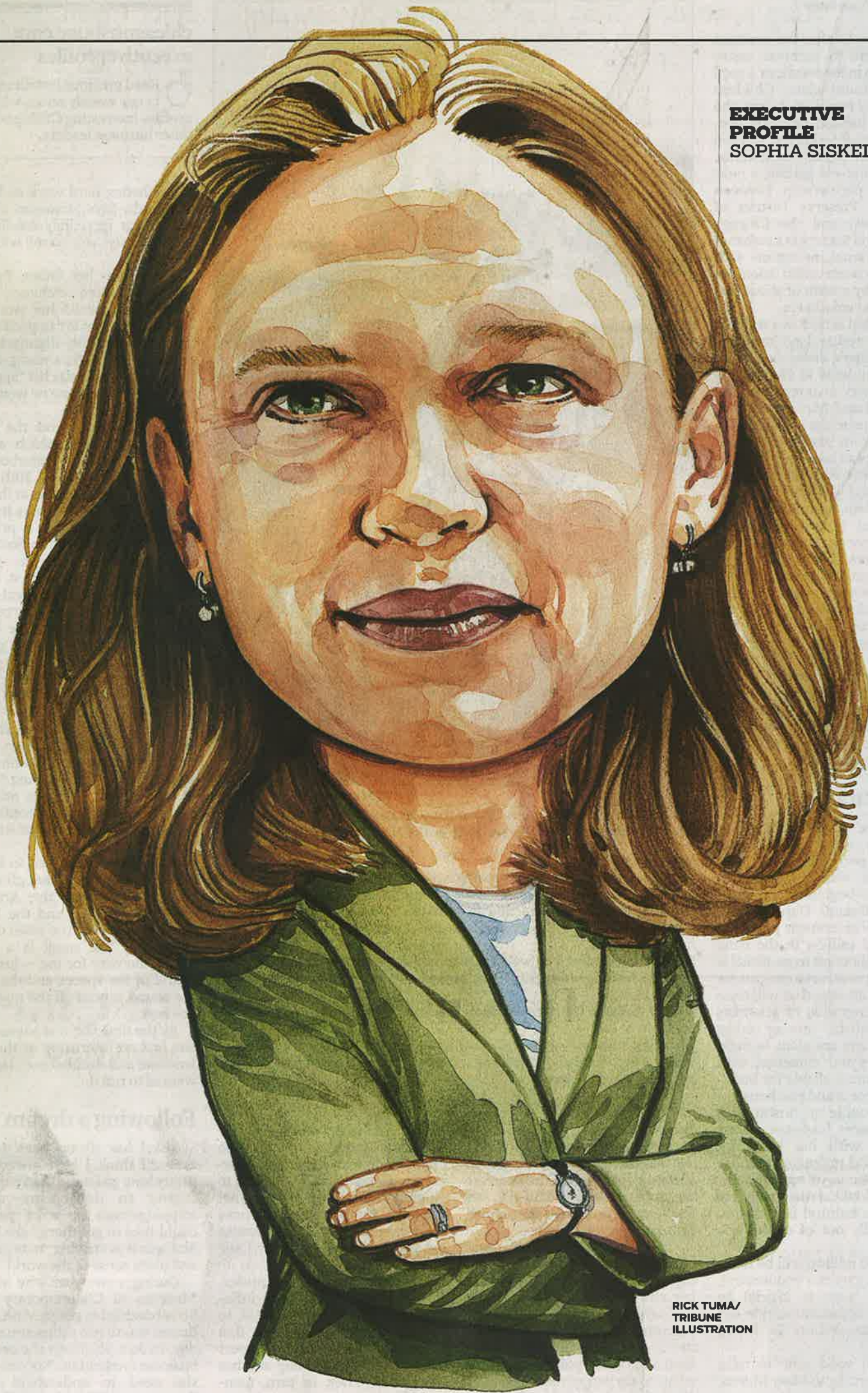
But in the first of these two cases, the justices narrowed the definition of a supervisor. They said that for a company to be liable in racial or sexual harassment cases, the harasser has to be a supervisor who has authority to hire, fire or demote an employee. Many of the country's lower courts had previously defined a supervisor as a person in charge of your day-to-day activity, which I'd argue is the logical definition of the term.

The ruling effectively turns most middle managers in America — and in cases where human resources departments are in charge of hiring and firing, possibly all managers — into a "co-worker."

"The effect of that is where you have employees who have their day-to-day work controlled by other employees, if those employees harass the people who work under them, those people may be reasonably nervous about complaining," said Deborah Widiss, an employment discrimination expert and associate professor at the Indiana University Maurer School of Law. "And if they do complain, the employer is far less likely to be held responsible."

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EXECUTIVE PROFILE SOPHIA SISKEL



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 ILLUSTRATION

A bold plan for growth

Botanic Garden's CEO leads ambitious fundraising effort with eye on expansion

BY CORILYN SHROPSHIRE | Tribune reporter

Sophia Siskel likes to think of the Chicago Botanic Garden as her ship, and herself as its captain. On a gray, spring afternoon, it seems her metaphor might prove a bit too true.

Siskel, 44, CEO of the North Shore institution since 2007, patrols the grounds in a rain jacket, rain boots and jeans just hours before one of the organization's biggest annual shindigs, the gala kickoff for the 13th Antique and Garden Fair. More than 700 patrons are expected.

Siskel, a descendant of an early family of Chicago art patrons, should be dressed for the event by now and mingling with early arrivals. Instead, she's preparing for the worst-case scenario: flooding.

The evening before brought torrential rains, leaving some parking lots and walkways underwater. Siskel and her team, from operations chiefs to valet parkers, fear the water will rise to engulf more of the campus, posing a safety risk as well as drenching the party.

A self-described worrier, Siskel has a plan, not only for the guests, but also for the vendors and their merchandise. If water reached the tents, Siskel says, she and "every person here (would) pick those antiques up off the ground, which is not ideal, but we could do it."

In the end, the gala goes off without a hitch, even if not as many patrons show up as expected. It raises \$258,000 for the 385-acre garden, conservation and education center.

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Botanic Garden CEO plans for the future

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In the weeks after the event, as spring turns to summer, more visitors pop in for a walk, or a yoga or horticultural class. Children enroll in day camp or observe the butterflies habitat, enjoying programming that Siskel has worked to make more broadly welcoming.

The 41-year-old garden, a public-private partnership between the Forest Preserve District of Cook County and the Chicago Horticultural Society, is a research and educational institution with almost 40 conservation scientists supported by a team of about 200 students and volunteers.

The garden serves as a training ground for future land stewards and researchers, Siskel says, from graduate students at Northwestern University to interns for the Bureau of Land Management. In one year, it provides instruction — in topics from garden care and maintenance to conservation biology — to 80,000 students of all ages. Through its urban agricultural program, the garden produces about 90,000 pounds of fresh produce that is made available in underserved areas.

Yet the garden's beauty, with its vast landscapes, prairies and blooms, makes some people, including some Chicago-area civic leaders, dismiss it as frivolous, Siskel says. To them, "we're like your pretty, daft cousin," Siskel says. "That someone can be so dismissive of a place, where they haven't been or don't understand because they think it's all about beauty is maddening."

Raising money

There are other challenges — specifically, money. Siskel has raised 30 percent of the \$125 million she was charged with bringing in beginning in 2009, when the Botanic Garden finalized its 10-year strategic plan.

With \$36 million in the bank and \$89 million left to go, Siskel is working to construct a campus for students of all ages that will train the next generation of scientists and naturalists, among other projects. There are plans to build greenhouses and nurseries, with naming rights available for buildings, classrooms and positions.

Amid trouble at institutions where finances have not always kept pace with big ideas for growth, Siskel maintains that her goal is ambitious, yet appropriate.

"If you look at the goals for other major cultural institutions, it's not really out of order," she says.

Some \$40 million will be dedicated to the garden's endowment, which she says is crucial to helping the organization ride out economic uncertainty in future years.

Now is a good time to raise money, according to Mary Morris, associate professor of museum studies at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. "We are coming out of this terrible recession, but it doesn't mean we won't have another," Morris says. "That's why the endowment is such an important piece. You need to have a cushion."

Siskel says no shovel will go into the ground unless she has raised at least 80 percent of the funds and the rest is promised in the near future. "The worst-case scenario is that it takes longer to raise than we would like," she says. "We will not spend money we do not have."

By "we" she means she's not doing this alone. Siskel frequently opts to pass credit along to her full-time staff of 240. Still, she's



JOSÉ M. OSORIO/TRIBUNE PHOTO

Sophia Siskel, president and CEO of the Chicago Botanic Garden, has helped cultivate growing attendance at the North Shore institution.

Residence: Highland Park

Family: Husband Jon is a filmmaker whose credits include the award-winning documentary "Louder Than a Bomb." They have two sons.

Hobby: Siskel is a skilled scuba diver thanks to holidays spent with her mother in Barbados. Growing up, she also dreamed of becoming a marine biologist.

Early Impressions: She worked as an exhibition coordinator at the Art Institute helping put together the popular 1995 retrospective of Claude Monet work.

On the Botanic Garden's Impact: "We serve as a place of wellness, of comfort, of joy."

On being a boss: "I know my weaknesses, and my team knows my weaknesses. Instead of squishing my face in them, they help me. Those are the best employees."

known as a strong manager and a perfectionist. That's in part why she was hired, says Will Hagenah, a former chairman of the board at the Botanic Garden who also led the search committee that chose Siskel.

"Don't kid yourself — like any other good manager, I'm sure there are some people who find her a bit intimidating," says Hagenah, who remains on the board's executive committee. "She has strong ideas about where you need to go at any point in time and wants to see people move ahead. ... A lot of people find that challenging at times."

Despite her impressive education (she attended Francis Parker, Choate, Wellesley College, the University of Chicago and Northwestern's Kellogg School of Management) and patrician background, a major factor in Siskel's professional success is her knack for warmth, putting people at ease and knowing how to speak to her audience, colleagues and former bosses say.

"She understands people ... and has a nice way about her," says board member Hagenah.

Siskel's mentors include Hagenah and Field Museum President Emeritus John McCarter, whom she credits for never dismissing

her as "young" or "female."

Having spent so much time one-on-one with her father growing up, "I know how to speak to older or mentor men in a way that has been appropriate, and I have been confident doing it, because my dad and I are so close," she says.

She recognizes that her professional trajectory has been influenced by her ability to speak to influential men in a way that creates trust and a sense of respect even though she's young and has new ideas. They, in turn, mentored her.

"If there was one thing that got me to where I am, more than hard work, more than passion, more than any kind of intelligence," Siskel says, "it was because my bosses invested themselves in me."

Leslie Hindman offered her a job at her eponymous auction company not long after Siskel graduated from Wellesley College in 1991. She started in the mail room but quickly rose to head an all-male team in the company's property department, where she was responsible for managing consignment inventory.

Siskel credits Hindman, who serves on the Arts Club board, with teaching her the importance

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of aesthetics, hard work and high standards. Says Hindman of Siskel: "She's incredibly intelligent, and she's also able to roll with the punches."

But it was her father, Patrick Shaw, a retired architect, who Siskel says opened her world to everything from art to gardening, from dining with dignitaries to rewiring lamps. As a young woman, she says, she was his "apprentice," and everywhere he went, she went with him.

Shaw descends from the Winterbotham family, which established the Joseph Winterbotham Collection of 19th and 20th century European paintings at the Art Institute. Family members helped found the Arts Club, a private, members-only haven in Streeterville for artists and patrons, with a public gallery on the first floor. Siskel, like her great-great-aunt Rue Winterbotham Carpenter and her grandmother Rue Winterbotham Shaw, is now its president. In her 20s, Siskel spent years organizing and editing a book about the history of the Arts Club and its collection.

Siskel's parents split when she was 9, and a couple of years later her mother moved to Washington to work at USAID, leaving Siskel in the care of her father. Still his daughter's mentor and confidant, he recently turned 80 and lives in downtown Chicago.

Both parents instilled in her a love of museums. Siskel grew up wandering around the Art Institute of Chicago and the Field Museum. "I loved the smell of the museums. The smell is a very strong memory for me — just the sound of the spaces and the way the sound echoes off the marble," she says.

By the time she was a teenager, she had an internship at the Art Institute and decided one day she wanted to run it.

Following a dream

Siskel has always been ambitious. "I think I have always set pretty lofty goals and then enjoyed trying to determine what steppingstones or what path I could take to get there," she says. She sees it as striving "to organize and make sense of the world."

During a two-year stint at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Siskel decided to get an MBA. Her dream was to run a museum some day. To do it, she knew she needed business credentials. Not only did she need to understand debt financing and be able to talk to a board made up primarily of business leaders, she also recognized that a quantitative background would boost her credibility.

In 1997 Siskel was recruited to work at the Field Museum. She thrived there for more than eight years, rising to become vice president of exhibitions and education. While working there, she met her husband, Jon, a nephew of the late Tribune film critic Gene Siskel.

The greatest challenge in her career came next, a difficult decision whether to leap from the Field Museum to the Chicago Botanic Garden in hopes of taking over the CEO role once then-chief Barbara Whitney Carr retired. Field, with its international repu-

tation, gravitas and Museum Campus location, stacked up against the much younger, lesser-known Botanic Garden. Even her father said, "I don't think you should go out there," she recalled.

But in 2006, she accepted the job in Glencoe, fearing she'd end up a relic herself if she stayed too long in one place. Her strategy worked. Less than a year later, after an international CEO search and several interviews, she moved into her immaculate, light-filled corner office overlooking the long entry road to the garden and a hillside of serviceberry trees.

Stepping into the top job wasn't easy. She wasn't yet 40, and though she knew museums, she had no experience in horticulture. She even took a class on it when she arrived.

Seeing the power of a CEO as a way to set an example, she made small changes such as opening the grounds on Christmas Day to welcome guests of all faiths and eliminating bottled water sales on-site, for environmental reasons.

This made a difference, she believes: "In our lives, we can make little decisions that make big

"The science and training that we're doing — those messages are now my life's work."

— Sophia Siskel

statements without pushing anything down anyone's throat."

Siskel went on to steer the institution through the recession — and consequent dive in charitable giving.

"Because Sophia is a strong, good manager, she managed to keep a large staff committed even when they weren't getting raises," says Carr, her predecessor. "It was really a textbook case study of how to survive during a deep recession." Siskel made some cuts, eliminating about 5 percent of the staff while maintaining the quality of public offerings, which "took some doing," Carr added.

In 2012 attendance was the highest in the garden's history for the fourth year in a row, Siskel says, and fundraising set a yearly record with \$26 million, an accomplishment she credits in part to programming. Under her watch, health and wellness offerings, including yoga, increased. The garden also hosted military veterans battling post-traumatic stress disorder.

The organization has carved out a niche in applied science and promoting research that influences public policy.

"We are going to try to find ways to make people more aware of the research which goes on at the garden on things like climate change, invasive species and other types of things people worry about," says board Chairman Robert Finke.

Siskel hopes raising that type of awareness will be her legacy.

"I feel like I spent my whole career being motivated and ambitious for myself. Now I feel like I have a calling that is much bigger than me," she says, referring to conservation. "The science and training that we're doing — those messages are now my life's work."

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