

Briefcase

Linda Paquette, whose interest in the law was sparked after leading a walkout of theater candy and popcorn attendants, was sworn in last week as California's newest lawyer who didn't graduate from law school.

"I didn't want to be part of the masses," said Paquette of her decision to take oath in the board room of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor from Court of Appeal Justice Arleigh Woods.

"I wanted to do something different and something I could share with people close to me. It gave me the opportunity to say thank you to the people who helped me. Plus the fact that Justice Woods is a former labor law attorney, and is a woman, was really nice, too."

Paquette made the unusual request to be sworn in by Justice Woods because she had prepared for the State Bar exam Abraham Lincoln style — apprenticing under an attorney, Gerald Goldman, partner in the Los Angeles labor law firm of Levy, Ansell & Goldman.

California is one of the few states that allows directed study. Paquette said that considering the low bar passage rate last month, 45.4 percent, she had reason to feel especially proud. She attended Peoples' College of Law for two years and then for two years was required to study under Goldman's tutelage for 20 hours a week and five hours under direct consultation. She was tested by Goldman and the tests had to be turned in to the State Bar. During this time she also worked as a law clerk at his firm.

Paquette became interested in labor law in the early 1970s when she was a union member candy stand attendant working for a movie theatre in San Diego. She led a walkout of theater employees and since that victory dreamed of becoming a labor lawyer.

"We got 'The Godfather' and because it did such good business we were working 50 to 60 hours a week, and our manager made us work in high heels. One day I came to work in white nurses' shoes and everybody got behind me and said, 'yeah — we feel the same way.' The manager finally gave in."

Paquette, 32, worked in several union jobs after that and while working those jobs realized that she would be a more effective advocate with a legal background.

"I have no regrets studying for the bar like I did," she said. "I felt scared sometimes, like anyone else, but I feel that what I learned at the law firm and under (Goldman) is much more useful to me as an attorney. And Peoples' College of Law serves an important purpose. It gives the opportunity to go to law school for people who might otherwise not be able to do it."

Paquette is past president of both California Young Democrats and the Coalition of Labor Union Women of the AFL-CIO.