

Salute to Women in Law

140 years ago, the Illinois Supreme Court ruled that Myra Bradwell could not practice law because she was a woman.

Until 60 years ago, Illinois women could not serve on juries.

Today more than one-third of Illinois' registered attorneys are women.

The Illinois Business Journal proudly salutes women practicing law across Southwestern Illinois.

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Special Section



Spotlight on Southwestern Illinois: Salute to Women in Law

Beth Bauer, Partner, HeplerBroom LLC, Edwardsville

By KATE GENO

Beth Bauer is a litigation attorney at HeplerBroom LLC with a primary emphasis in the defense of complex, multi-party civil cases and class actions, including consumer fraud, personal injury, product liability and construction.

Bauer began her tenure at HeplerBroom in 2001. She initially worked on appellate cases and then in 2002, Larry Hepler was working on a large class action case and asked Bauer to assist him. After the collaboration, she joined his team

full-time. Bauer says she has always appreciated HeplerBroom for the firm's dedication to mentoring and developing the talent of its young lawyers. Bauer has handled many Illinois Consumer Fraud Act cases, which typically are brought as class action and pharmaceutical product liability cases. Some pharmaceutical cases involve defending against people's claims that they have developed an addiction to the prescription pain medication OxyContin®. Bauer also takes on property tax and environmental claims, which most recently included the Phillips 66 Refinery as a client. She likes a great variety of cases and enjoys learning her clients' businesses and industries. There is always more to learn, which makes the work rewarding and interesting, she says.

Bauer cites a case in 2009 that provided an opportunity to learn a new industry. A crude oil pipeline owner was accused of losing several hundred thousand barrels of oil and hired HeplerBroom to defend the company. Bauer personally researched the case by learning about crude oil pipeline operations and met with the employees of the pipeline operator. Bauer and Hepler proved that the accusation made against the company was incorrect, resulting in a verdict of no liability for the client. According to Bauer, the research was fascinating; it felt like putting together pieces of a giant puzzle. The road to Bauer's successful law career began on a farm in Central Illinois where she grew up. She acknowledges family friend and former Sunday school teacher, Judge John Coady, for sparking her interest in the legal field. Coady was

instrumental in her journey into higher education, says Bauer. She attended Washington University in St. Louis for her undergraduate degree and Saint Louis University School of Law for her JD. She is married to Brock Bauer, a consultant for MedAssets in the health care industry; they have three daughters aged nine, five and 15 months. Bauer credits HeplerBroom for its appreciation for family life which enables her to be at home with her daughters part-time. The majority of Bauer's spare time is devoted to her family and her church. She volunteers at Meadow Heights Baptist Church in Collinsville and Maryville Christian School. She also donates time to the Madison County Legal Clinic, which offers pro bono legal services, and fundraises for Baptist Children's Home and Family Services based in Carmi, Ill.

Meredith Head, Associate Attorney, Byron Carlson Petri & Kalb LLC, Edwardsville

By KERRY L. SMITH

It takes a unique combination of legal expertise and compassion to work in the practice areas of estate planning, probate and trust administration. Assisting family members - many of whom may be working with an attorney for the first time - requires an attorney who can make the process understandable, often during an emotional time for a family member that has prompted a visit

with the attorney in the first place. Meredith Head readily embraces and embodies that calling. An associate attorney at Edwardsville and St. Louis-based Byron Carlson Petri & Kalb LLC, her areas of practice include estate planning, probate/trust administration, probate litigation, real estate, business and employment law, commercial/civil litigation and appellate practice. She is licensed in both Illinois and Missouri. Head earned her Juris Doctor degree from Saint Louis University School of Law in 2007 and her undergraduate degree in political science and history from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her choice of primary practice area,

estate planning, sheds light on Head's overall commitment to service, one she says began before being admitted to the Bar and one that continues beyond the bounds of the work day. Head says estate planning allows her to work closely with clients to draft and implement an estate plan that meets their individual goals and needs. She strives to educate her clients on estate planning so they can more fully participate in designing the right estate plan for them. One of the biggest challenges many of her clients face, Head says, is that they own farms with property values in the millions of dollars but with relatively little present cash value. How to manage that in terms of ever-changing tax laws, both state and federal, is one of many services that an attorney skilled in estate planning can provide families and individuals. Another big issue, she says, is how parents can structure their estate to make

sure children, especially those with special needs, are provided for in case something would happen to the parent or parents; this is a scenario in which she and fellow Byron Carlson Petri & Kalb attorneys frequently assist clients. It's a wise idea for individuals and families to touch base with their attorney every couple of years on estate planning issues, says Head, even if their specific situation hasn't changed because tax laws, powers of attorney and estate planning rules are continually changing. Head is active in the Christian Activity Center, a nonprofit organization that provides holistic growth and nurturing opportunities to children, youth and families in East St. Louis. She is also active in ALIVE (Alternatives to Living in Violent Environments), a nonprofit organization that provides counseling and emergency shelter to victims of domestic violence.

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IBJ Business News

HeplerBroom included in 2013 Best Lawyers rankings

U.S. News & Best Lawyers have recognized HeplerBroom nationally as a Tier 2 for its work across the country in mass tort, class action and professional negligence defense.

WVS named Tier 1 Law Firm by U.S. News & World Report

Williams Venker & Sanders has been included in U.S. News & World Report's 2012 Best Law Firms listing for the National and St.

Louis Metropolitan area rankings. Nationally, the firm was given the highest ranking of Tier 1 for its work in medical malpractice defense and product liability defense.

MM&R welcomes Lorenz

Mathis, Marifian & Richter Ltd. announces that Natalie Lorenz has joined the law firm as an associate attorney.

WVS welcomes Hodge

Williams Venker Sanders announces the addition of Matthew J. Hodge as its newest associate.

B | C | P | K

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Spotlight on Southwestern Illinois: Salute to Women in Law

Dayna Johnson, Officer, Greensfelder, Hemker & Gale P.C., Belleville

By KATE GENO

Dayna Johnson has held a fascination for the law for many years, dating back to



Johnson

University School of Law in 1995.

Johnson says she always preferred interpreting the law and defending cases in court. She worked for a time at a small insurance defense firm in Edwardsville in personal injury and was able to go to court on a weekly basis. It helped her realize

her experience as a legal secretary, court reporter and paralegal. When her daughter entered college, Johnson decided to become an attorney and graduated from Saint Louis

that she belonged in litigation and allowed her to become familiar with the workings of the court.

In 2002 Johnson joined Greensfelder, Hemker & Gale P.C. and is now an officer in the Litigation Practice Group. Based at the firm's Belleville office, she works in a wide range of practice areas including product liability, mass toxic tort, premises liability, personal injury litigation and insurance coverage issues. Johnson handles a variety of cases and is not pigeonholed into any one area which is very interesting, she says. She recently expanded into corporate law representing employers, as well as environmental law which is a priority for her.

Johnson says she wants to help people by explaining the legal system to them and hopefully taking away any fear or uncertainty they may have, thereby making the process easier. Establishing

long-term relationships with clients is a huge bonus, she adds.

Johnson is active in the city of Highland where her husband was raised. The couple spends much of their time helping the community. She donates time to the local Habitat for Humanity chapter, building homes and raising funds. She also volunteers with the city's Entrepreneur Mentoring Program, which began one year ago. This free program provides local entrepreneurs with a network of business professionals that assess their business plans and offer tactical advice. The volunteer network includes bankers, accountants and lawyers. Johnson considers the program a perfect opportunity to sustain the city's future growth.

She is a member of the Madison County and St. Clair County Bar Associations and serves on the pro bono committee and

continuing education committee.

Johnson volunteers for the Madison County Foreclosure Mediation Program that helps homeowners facing foreclosure. She mediates between the homeowner and the lender to give them an opportunity to talk and look for solutions.

In 2005 Johnson began a four-year volunteer commitment to the Constitutional Law Club's "Earn It, Learn It, or Lose It" program. The club invited community members to meet once a month for four years and provided reading materials on Supreme Court decisions regarding constitutional law. Seven people attended the event in its entirety. The experience was challenging yet rewarding, she says.

Johnson resides in Glen Carbon, is married to Mel Patthast and together they have three children and five grandchildren.

Lisa LaConte, Partner, Heyl, Royster, Voelker & Allen, Edwardsville & Peoria

By KERRY L. SMITH

As a partner and co-chair of her firm's Toxic Torts & Asbestos practice group,



LaConte

promote more and more women to senior ranks, they in turn expect to have an opportunity to be represented by women attorneys; it's a credit to law firms such as Heyl, Royster, Voelker & Allen, says LaConte, that they promote a culture where women are encouraged to become partners and thrive in their careers.

Out of Heyl Royster's 21 female attorneys, seven are currently partners, according to LaConte. Her work in asbestos litigation began in 1988, just as the first Madison County cases were being defended. Over the past 24 years, she has

Lisa LaConte says the steady increase in female attorneys through the years mirrors an equally healthy increase in female corporate executives. As corporations and other companies

continued to specialize in the defense of the asbestos cases, refining her practice to meet the needs of the ever-changing mix of companies finding themselves named as defendants.

LaConte's entire law career thus far has been with Heyl Royster. She began as a law clerk when joining the firm in 1988 in the Edwardsville office. In 1992, she relocated to the Peoria office and continues to practice in both the firm's Edwardsville and Peoria offices. She has been a partner at Heyl Royster since 1999. Lisa serves as the firm's Hiring Partner and as Co-Chair of the Diversity Committee.

LaConte earned her JD from Washington University School of Law. She later earned a post-graduate law degree or LL.M (Master of Laws) in Health Law from Saint Louis University School of Law in 1992, qualifying her as one of only a few individuals in downstate Illinois with such a degree and likely the only woman; her health law credentials provide LaConte with a unique legal expertise when representing hospitals or physician practice groups in regulatory issues, medical staff issues and health

law matters. In addition to her litigation work, she continues to provide counsel to healthcare clients on matters including credentialing, licensure, medical staff issues, employment issues, corporate compliance issues and more. LaConte has been a frequent speaker on health law and risk management issues and has taught masters level courses in healthcare law for two universities in Illinois.

The combination of litigating in hands-on defense work for Heyl Royster clients involved in asbestos-related cases and her work as counsel to healthcare professionals creates a mix that translates into a professionally rewarding career,

LaConte says.

Women considering a career in the field of law should be prepared to work hard to succeed and take advantage of every opportunity to grow as a professional, according to LaConte. Thankfully, she adds, women are reaching a point where (with only a few exceptions) in the law profession they are judged solely on the quality of their work and their work ethic.

LaConte's hobbies include competing in the equestrian sport of dressage and restoring classic cars, which she enjoys doing with her father.

She and her husband, Don, live in Peoria.

Did You Know?

In 1907, Catherine McCulloch became the first woman to serve in any judiciary capacity in Illinois when she was elected Justice of the Peace in Evanston.

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The choice of a lawyer is an important decision and should not be based solely upon advertisements.

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Nancy Larson, Partner, Harter, Larson & Dodd LLC, Belleville, Mascoutah

By KATE GENO

Nancy Larson is a partner with Harter, Larson & Dodd LLC with offices in Belleville and Mascoutah. Her practice is concentrated in the areas of estate planning, elder law, special needs planning, probate and trust administration, guardianships and real estate matters.



Larson says she addresses important issues for people such as how the end of their life will unfold when it comes to their assets, benefits, living conditions and

overall estate planning. She also educates people with regard to services like Medicaid and VA benefits. She provides intergenerational planning for all ages and has a special interest for the elderly and individuals with special needs. Many clients facing changes in physical and mental health consult with Larson to plan for their future. She says it is important to make those big decisions when you are able, or the court will make them for you later. Larson pursued the law because she simply wanted to help people. She loved school and majored in biology and chemistry for her undergraduate degrees, inspired by her parents who are both doctors. She attended Saint Louis University School of Law to obtain the tools required to solve problems for

people and to relieve their stress. Larson enjoys the fact that no two days are the same; her clients' lives and stories are always fascinating, she says; there is a real sense of satisfaction derived from giving people relief and helping them feel more comfortable about their future. Larson's goal is to alleviate her clients' fears regarding the rules of the law. She began practicing law in 1980 with her husband, Gary Harter, who passed away in 2006. Initially, they represented any client that walked through the door, she says. Her practice later evolved into what it is today, which includes the addition of attorney and partner Heidi Dodd. Larson says she has always had an affinity for senior citizens, which she discovered when she worked at a nursing home in high school. The managers at the

nursing home were role models for her because they respected each individual's dignity. In addition to her law practice, Larson serves on the boards for the Area Agency on Aging in Southwestern Illinois and Our Lady of the Snows Apartment Community. She supports other organizations that benefit the community such as Trinity Services for Adult Development Disabilities, Hospice of Southern Illinois and Habitat for Humanity. Larson is a frequent speaker on a variety of elder law, disability and estate planning topics, and is a contributing writer for the *Adult Lifestyles* magazine published by the *Belleville News-Democrat*. She recently married William F. O'Hara and has two adult children, Mark and Sarah.

Jessica Liss, Resident Partner, Jackson Lewis LLP, St. Louis

By KERRY L. SMITH

To Columbia, Ill. resident Jessica Liss, family comes first. That being said, it's not surprising the resident partner chose to practice law with a firm she says is extraordinarily supportive of female attorneys and the promotion of women in leadership positions.



Liss is a resident partner at Jackson Lewis, a workplace law firm with more than 700 attorneys representing management in 49 locations across the U.S. This month is the one-year anniversary of her arrival at the firm; she

was recruited specifically to help Jackson Lewis open its St. Louis office. A 1999 graduate from Saint Louis University School of Law with an undergraduate degree in economics and English from Pennsylvania's Bucknell U., Liss' career began as a public defender for the city of St. Louis. Liss says it was one of the best career choices she could have made. During those two years, she was able to meet women in key leadership positions, many of whom are now judges, and she also cultivated friendships that remain today. Learning how to advocate for the indigent was also a skill that Liss gained during that time; meeting defendants where they are and helping them through the system is a need that Liss was glad she could help meet. Working as a public defender was also an ideal environment for gaining trial experience. From there, Liss transitioned into civil litigation in the private sector, joining the firm of Rabbitt, Pitzer & Snodgrass PC (now Pitzer Snodgrass PC) and working there for nearly 12 years. Liss was the only female associate to rise through the ranks and become a partner in the firm. At Jackson Lewis, Liss' current practice is employment litigation, representing clients in both the public and private sector. She represents a number of police officers and police departments in civil rights cases, often calling upon her experience from those days working in the city of St. Louis. She is now counsel for the city of St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department Internal Affairs Division. About 50 percent of the legal work Liss practices today is rooted in the public sector. The remainder, she says, involves areas in the private sector relative

to employment litigation representing employers and management. Liss is a past president (2009-2010) of the Women Lawyers' Association of Greater St. Louis. During her term as WLA president, the association raised an unprecedented amount of money to award deserving female law school candidates for Linda J. Murphy Scholarships in memory of the late WLA member and trial attorney who died of breast cancer in 1999. Liss was named a 2009 Up and Coming Lawyer by *Missouri Lawyers Weekly* and a Super Lawyer in employment defense, civil rights and First Amendment issues. Liss and her husband, Steve, have a two-year-old son, Benjamin. They both credit their ability to balance family and careers to the supportive roles that their parents, Columbia and St. Louis residents, play in their son's life.

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Spotlight on Southwestern Illinois: Salute to Women in Law

Kelli Madigan, Shareholder, Mathis, Marifian & Richter Ltd., Belleville

By KATE GENO

Kelli Madigan is a shareholder with Mathis, Marifian & Richter Ltd. who focuses her practice in business law, estate planning, taxation, real estate and banking. Madigan received both her bachelor's degree and juris doctor from Saint Louis University. While attending law school, she discovered an interest in the tax courses and decided to focus her area of practice on business and tax planning. While searching for a law firm to apply to upon graduation, a professor



Madigan

highly recommended Mathis, Marifian & Richter due to its strong reputation as a tax firm. Madigan was hired by the firm in 1996 and has been there ever since. She began as an associate, learning about the workings of the firm, and eventually moved into general business law, tax planning and contract work.

She primarily represents closely held, for-profit companies located in this region with matters involving sales and acquisitions, corporate reorganizations, buy-sell arrangements, tax planning and real estate transactions. She also represents individuals in the preparation of wills, trusts and estate planning. Madigan works with a number of local banks as well, helping with mergers and transactional work. She is licensed in Illinois and Missouri.

Based at the firm's Belleville office,

Madigan says it is a great place to work and that her colleagues make the job worthwhile. Many projects can require multi-tasking, she adds, and her fellow attorneys at the firm step in to help when necessary.

A large part of Madigan's job is to navigate the ever-changing landscape of tax code to bring her clients the most up-to-date information. Her expertise has made her a respected lecturer and she has given presentations on topics such as taxation and estate planning. The firm offers tax seminars for accountants and advisers every year in Fairview Heights and Mt. Vernon.

She has served on the board of Family Hospice in Belleville and is a big believer in the organization's passion as a hospice provider. Madigan has also recently become involved with the ALS

Association after a relative was diagnosed with the illness.

In addition, she is a graduate and continued supporter of Leadership Belleville, a leadership training program coordinated through the Greater Belleville Chamber of Commerce. The goals of the program are to develop effective community leaders and raise awareness of important issues that concern business and the community. The nine-month program includes monthly presentations on issues pertaining to the Belleville area such as government, business, education, health care, economic development, law enforcement and justice.

Madigan lives in the St. Louis area and is involved in her church and her children's school. She is married to husband Patrick and they have two sons, Owen (10 yrs) and Aidan (8 yrs).

Lisa A. Reynolds, Associate Attorney, Boggs, Avellino, Lach & Boggs LLC, Belleville

By KERRY L. SMITH

Navigating the stark contrasts and the nuances in Illinois and Missouri workers' compensation law while representing employers and insurance carriers in both states brings Lisa A. Reynolds' legal expertise to bear.



Reynolds

An associate attorney at Boggs, Avellino, Lach & Boggs LLC in Belleville and St. Louis, and is licensed to practice in the states of Missouri and Illinois, including the U.S. District Court of the Eastern District of Missouri. Reynolds helps her clients reach favorable resolutions - including settlements and dismissals - in all types

of workers' compensation claims, ranging from soft tissue injuries to permanent total disability and death cases. Reynolds also speaks at workers' compensation seminars for insurers and employers.

Reynolds' desire to become an attorney began at an early age; she was inspired when reading "To Kill a Mockingbird" in the fifth grade.

Reynolds earned her Juris Doctor and Health Law Certificate from Saint Louis University School of Law in 2006. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree, with honors in Communications, from the University of Missouri-Columbia in 2002. During law school, Reynolds completed clerkships at the U.S. Attorney's Office, Dept. of Fraud and Abuse and the Office of General Counsel at SLU's Health Science Center. She also clerked for the administrative law judges at the St. Louis division of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

and worked in legal services for BJC HealthCare.

Reynolds enjoys the schedule of workers' compensation law; on average the trials tend to last only a day or two, she says, as opposed to a civil litigators' schedule that often requires trials that can stretch out for a week or two. Another advantage of litigating workers' comp cases, she says, is that the experts who testify are generally located fairly close to her clients. Although practicing in two states requires travel to Mt. Vernon, Ill. and Joplin, Mo. where the cases are heard or settled, Reynolds is able to balance her professional schedule with her personal responsibilities as a mother of nearly three-year-old twins. Reynolds credits her husband, John, who is also an attorney, with being a supportive spouse in helping her continue an active legal career.

In addition to being a member of the Women Lawyers Association of

Greater St. Louis, Reynolds is active in The National Association of Minority & Women Owned Law Firms - an organization that her firm's managing partner, Beth Boggs, engaged the firm in several years ago. NAMWOLF promotes diversity in the legal profession by fostering the development of relationships between preeminent minority and women owned law firms and private/public entities. Reynolds serves on the Emerging Leaders Initiative, which includes those practicing for 10 years or fewer. She is also a member of the National Retail and Restaurant Defense Association.

Reynolds was named to the 2011 Super Lawyers Rising Stars list and was honored by Top Attorneys as one of Missouri and Kansas' Outstanding Young Lawyers for her work in the area of workers' compensation. She has also twice been recognized as Attorney of the Year within her firm.

Did You Know?

In 1870, Ada Miser Kepley was the first woman to graduate from law school in the United States. She attended Chicago University Law School, predecessor to the Union College of Law, later known as the Northwestern University School of Law.

* * *

In 1894, Ida Platt became the first black woman admitted to practice law in Illinois.

IBJ Business News

Brown & James P.C. makes "Best Law Firms" list

U.S. News Media Group and Best Lawyers has included Brown & James P.C. in its 2013 "Best Law Firms" rankings. Brown & James ranks nationally within Tier 1 for medical malpractice law - defendants.

HeplerBroom attorneys recognized as "Best Lawyers"

HeplerBroom LLC announces that eight of its attorneys - Gordon R. Broom, Glenn E. Davis, Jeffrey S.

Hebrank, Larry E. Hepler, Theodore J. MacDonald, Jr., Thomas J. Magee, Gerard T. Noce and Catherine C. Reiter - have been selected by their peers for inclusion in The Best Lawyers in America® 2013.

Five attorneys join HeplerBroom

HeplerBroom LLC welcomes four associate attorneys to its Edwardsville office - Alex Belotserkovsky, Kevin Birkenmeier, Elizabeth Kellett and Anthony Silva - and one, Jessica Galanos, to its Springfield office.



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Spotlight on Southwestern Illinois: Salute to Women in Law

Sue Schultz, Counsel, Sandberg Phoenix & von Gontard P.C., O’Fallon

By **KERRY L. SMITH**

If you have a legal issue involving a utility, Sue Schultz is uniquely experienced to assist you. Schultz leads Sandberg Phoenix and von Gontard’s



Schultz

cooperatively owned and quasi-governmental utility companies. Different types of providers of utility services are governed by different laws; her colleagues and clients say that few attorneys in Southern Illinois understand the complex regulatory environment as

Energy and Natural Resources group, which provides services to customers and landowners dealing with utilities, as well as to investor-owned,

well as Schultz.

She joined Sandberg Phoenix in January of 2011 and represents clients not only in utility matters, but also in real estate and business matters.

A Juris Doctor graduate from the University of Illinois College of Law in 1987, magna cum laude, Schultz is certified as a public accountant and began her career with the Belleville office of Thompson and Mitchell (now Thompson Coburn LLP). She then spent 10 years as lead in-house counsel for Illinois American Water Co., Iowa American Water Co. and an affiliated pipeline company. During her time at American Water, she provided the legal expertise to acquire property, finance, obtain necessary environmental and economic regulatory permits and construct a \$38.7 million water treatment facility in Alton.

In 2004 Schultz returned to private practice, and developed her expertise in

real estate development and commercial leasing. Since then, she has assisted business owners, homeowners’ associations, landowners, electric and water cooperatives and water districts in a full range of legal issues.

Schultz says she enjoys the interrelated aspects of the various areas of the law that she has the privilege of practicing. She credits Sandberg Phoenix with being true to its claim of operating a large firm, with a small firm culture.

She currently serves as a member on Sandberg Phoenix’s Charitable Efforts Committee and as the liaison for Join Hands ESL, an East St. Louis-based charity aimed at breaking the cycle of poverty for children in East St. Louis and one of four organizations the firm has agreed to support, as a Top 4 Charity in 2012. She also advocates for Motion for Kids (originally known as Project Angel Tree), a partnership between the St. Louis Rams and the Bar Association

of Metropolitan St. Louis, created to provide a special holiday celebration for children with one or more parents who are incarcerated; the charity has since expanded to include children in the foster care system. Schultz has previously served on the boards of several nonprofit organizations supporting the care and well-being of animals, as well as serving on the Illinois State Bar Association’s Utility and Transportation Law Section Council.

Schultz’s hobbies include raising and competing with Arabian horses, and caring for rescue dogs and cats on the farm where she lives between Belleville and Millstadt. Schultz and her horses have received several national Top 10 awards, and a Reserve National Championship award in dressage; she is the 2012 Champion of the St. Louis Area Dressage Society’s Schooling Show Division for amateur riders competing at Second Level and above.

Lucy Unger, Managing Partner, Williams, Venker & Sanders LLC, St. Louis

By **KATE GENO**

With 20 years of experience as an attorney, Lucy Unger has enjoyed a unique career path.

After graduating with a B.A. from



Unger

the Missouri Court of Appeals. Crandall was an excellent mentor, according to Unger, and helped her feel comfortable working with judges. After then working for a firm in Clayton, she accepted a

Loyola University (summa cum laude) in 1986 and a JD from Washington University School of Law in 1989, Unger worked as a clerk for Judge Bill Crandall at

position with Anheuser-Busch Companies’ in-house legal department. She worked in the company’s product liability department for four years, which gave her a different perspective on practicing law, she says. She then decided to stay home for three years and focus on raising her children. When Unger was ready to return to work, she accepted a commercial litigation position at a firm with several attorneys who later broke away to start Williams, Venker & Sanders. She made the move with them and has been working at WVS for 11 years.

Williams, Venker & Sanders is a small to mid-size law firm with 30 lawyers. Unger says she enjoys the corporate culture at WVS, particularly the importance it places on family. Depending on the market, the majority of Unger’s cases are personal injury defense or commercial litigation. She defends hospitals, doctors and product

manufacturers in this region in medical malpractice and product liability cases.

Unger admits to having a strong competitive spirit. Her favorite part of being an attorney is winning cases. She loved trial work during law school and knew she wanted to be in front of a jury. Her professors recommended personal injury litigation since it is the friendlier side of litigation compared to criminal law, says Unger.

In recognition of her civil litigation defense work, Unger has been listed in Missouri and Kansas *Super Lawyers* and *Super Lawyers Corporate Counsel Edition*.

Unger is a St. Louis native and one of 13 children, with seven sisters and five brothers. Her parents encouraged their daughters to work hard and go to college just like their sons. Unger is grateful to her mother and father for their foresight

and equanimity so she could have the educational and career opportunities that she has had. When it came time to choose a career, Unger says she was influenced by her father - who was unable to finish law school - and her older brother, who is a lawyer and allowed her to work in his firm while she attended school.

Unger has four children, ranging in age from eight years to 20 years old. Two of her children have special needs so she is committed to supporting them in the education and human services system. As a result, her pro bono and charity work is geared toward support services for adults with developmental disabilities. She volunteers for Trinity Services, a nonprofit organization with a mission to help people with disabilities live full and abundant lives.

She is an avid reader and enjoys playing the piano.

Did You Know?

Alta Hulett of Rockford was Illinois’ first woman lawyer, admitted to the bar on June 4, 1873, her 19th birthday.

* * *

Mary M. Bartelme was elected to the bench in 1923, the first Illinois woman elected to a judgeship.

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