

The Journal of the DuPage County Bar Association

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Eight Women to Watch

by Christa Schneider & Sean McCumber

Angel Traub

Angel Traub is the principal of A. Traub & Associates, a family, divorce, and real estate law firm in Lombard, Illinois. More than that, Angel is formidable opponent, loving mother, and active participant in Judges' Nite. She graduated from Northern Illinois University in 1998 with a degree in corporate communications and a Spanish minor. She went on to attend John Marshall Law School, where she studied with colleagues Emily Carrara and Sharon Knobbe. Angel graduated from John Marshall in 2001, and ran her law career her way ever since.



Angel Traub

She was first Angel M. Traub, Attorney at Law; then A. Traub & Cadiz; and then A. Traub & Associates. She did work as a summer associate at a large firm, like many law students do. However, she never liked the inability to choose which clients to represent and disliked the lack of direct contact with clients. Over 60% of Angel's clients come to her with divorce, paternity, or other family law problems. The other 40% of her time is devoted to real estate matters, either transactional or litigation. However, Angel neglected to mention an area of law that I have seen her take an active role in – serving as guardian ad litem in probate and adoption matters. Her commitment to serving others shines through in those appointments.

Angel notes that female attorneys are still perceived as less knowledgeable about the law, but that perception falls mostly upon younger female attorneys. Angel has her own family and children to care for, and the rigors of the profession, she notes, sometimes make personal time tough to allocate to all people who demand it. Angel adds, though, that in the last ten years, female attorneys have made great strides and have better self-perceptions. As she becomes the Past President of the DuPage Association of Women Lawyers this June, she offers this advice to other female attorneys: to the matriarchs of the profession: open up to and mentor younger female attorneys; to the youngsters: seek advice and work together with all attorneys to improve the profession.

Chantelle Jackson

It is rare that an elementary school yearbook will predict the future. But when the determined little sixth grader, Chantelle Jackson, proclaimed in her yearbook she would represent kids when she grows up-sure enough, it came true.



Chantelle Jackson

For those who know Chantelle, this resolve, even at such a young age, will not come as a surprise. Chantelle brings a certain energy, drive, and enthusiasm in everything that she does, be it participating in Judges Night, Speaking at Child Advocacy Seminars, or serving as vice-chair for the DCBA law-day committee.

Chantelle Jackson works currently a the supervisor of the DuPage County Public Defender's Office Juvenile division, where she concentrates her practice in representing juveniles on criminal matters and parents on abuse, neglect, and dependency matters. Prior to that, she was with the Cook County Public Guardian's office, where she represented the best interest of juveniles as attorney and Guardian as Litem on abuse, neglect, and dependency cases.

Juvenile law is a "specialty within a specialty." Chantelle remarks that she has encountered many woman attorneys in this particular area of law, estimating the 80% of the attorneys at the Public Guardian's Office were women. She believes this to be the case because women, generally speaking, have more heart for children. A lot of the juvenile court system is not cold, hard

and legal. There is a lot of gray area that involves a certain amount of social work.

Because the Juvenile Court Act is designed to rehabilitate the child, not punish him, Chantelle works regularly with the State's Attorney, probation, various residential facilities and counselors, to devise sentencing options that will best address the needs of each juvenile. Chantelle comments that though this process, she has found that women tend to be more willing to find a common ground that is in the best interest of rehabilitating the child.

Chantelle is very much involved in politics, and points out that this is such an exciting time for our country. As an undergrad at Ohio State University, Chantelle worked as a foot soldier for various campaigns, going door to door to spread the word out about candidates and registering people to vote. Chantelle truly believes that we all have a civic duty to be involved in politics. "You can't complain about the government if you've done nothing to fix it!"

And fix it she will certainly try. Chantelle lives in Bolingbrook with her husband Aaron, and would love to run for a village office. It is that go-getter, matter-of-fact attitude that makes Chantelle Jackson a woman to watch.

Marcelline DeFalco

A tall woman dressed in black stood before Judge Hollis Webster. A question had come up during the jury's deliberation, and the parties were discussing a proper response. After this discussion, the woman walked back to the galley where I was seated, greeted me with a smile, and introduced herself as Marcie DeFalco, the woman I had arranged to interview. Marcie had no intention of leaving the courthouse while the jury was still out on the case she had just tried, so we went up to the Attorney Resource Center to discuss life, leisure, and the law.



Marcie grew up in the legal community of DuPage County, as her father, Mauro DeFalco, was an attorney. She spent her younger years working at his office and also spent a year working for Judge Bonnie Wheaton. Marcie attended North Eastern Illinois University, where she had a scholarship to play varsity volleyball. She graduated with a degree in sociology, and went on to attend John Marshall Law School.

After graduating cum laude from law school, Marcie returned to Wheaton to work for Mulherin, Rehfeldt, & Varchetto. Marcie always knew she wanted to practice in DuPage or Kane County, commenting that there is a greater air of professionalism out here as opposed to working in the city. She observes that people treat each other with more respect and seem to have a greater esteem for the court system and its process in general.

Marcie eventually made partner at Mulherin, Rehfeldt & Varchetto, where she practices in general liability defense and municipality defense, but spends the majority of her time on medical malpractice defense where she defends nurses, doctors, and nursing homes. As many of these cases do not settle, Marcie spends a great deal of time at trial. Marcie loves this aspect of her job, because every time she has a new case, she has to learn a new area of medicine. Or at least learn it well enough to explain to someone else, which in Marcie's case, is a jury.

Marcie comments that she does not see many women in this area of law, particularly at the advanced level at which she practices. She notes that the key women in this area of law have been elevated to the bench, pointing to Judge French and Judge Hollis Webster. Marcie speculates this may be attributed to the demanding nature of litigation. When on trial, Marcie works many late nights and many early mornings.

Luckily, Marcie is married to insurance defense attorney Doug Strohm, who understands how demanding trial can be. The couple have two young children, Daniel, 4, and Elise 1 1/2. Marcie points out that she was married for six years before they decided to have children, as Marcie devoted her early years to building a strong and successful client base.

Marcie comments that she is advantaged by being one of the few local women in this area of law, as some medical cases are more gender specific, such as a still-born baby case. As a woman she is better suited to communicate to the jury regarding these specifically woman issues.

That being said, Marcie admits that it is sometimes difficult to balance such a demanding career with a family, but hopes to see more women take on the challenge.

Michelle Moore

The fourth floor hallways were crowded. The smell of cigarette smoke lingered in the air around criminal defendants waiting for their case to be called. An aggravated battery. A retail theft. A residential burglary. They stand in droves. Certainly the people most apt to defend these brutes are brutes themselves, right? Such a statement could not be further from the truth, particularly when speaking of Criminal Defense attorney Michelle Moore.



Michelle Moore

When questioned why she became an attorney, Michelle comments that she was destined to either to be a lawyer or a super-sleuth, pointing to all the Nancy Drew she read and all the Miami Vice she watched at a young age. On a more serious note, Michelle points to the fatal shooting of two family members that left a subtle and permanent change in her life.

Michelle started her education at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, where she was very much involved with the Gamma Phi Beta Sorority, and other such student organizations.

After college, Michelle attended Loyola University Chicago School of Law where she received various academic recognitions in Trial Advocacy Courses. Michelle also did a great deal of interning, where she learned very quickly that she was not a "desk-lawyer." This moment came when she was handed a stack of papers and placed in a cubicle to analyze their contents for the Illinois Insurance Exchange. Needless to say this internship did not last, but therein Michelle learned a lasting career lesson. Find a job you love. Just as you wouldn't want to be married to someone you don't like, understand, and feel passionate about you shouldn't have a job you don't like, understand, and feel passionate about.

Michelle unquestionably carries that passion with her in both her professional and her personal life. On weekends, Michelle can be found golfing, attending ball games, spending time with her family and friends, cheering for the Illini, seeing musicals, and shopping. Michelle has a known addiction for shoes, jewelry and purses, a habit she happily supports with her growing legal practice.

Michelle recently opened a second office in Yorkville, IL with new partner Kim DiGiovanni. Among Michelle's impressive resume of cases is the most recent and highly publicized defense of Luigi T. Adamo, whom she co-chaired with the more seasoned Richard Beuke and Jack Donahue. Many of Michelle's cases however, go unnoticed, as she takes a great deal of care to try to minimize her client's exposure to any public embarrassment that may be derived from their circumstance.

Michelle sits on the board for the Dupage County Criminal Defense Lawyers Association, is a member of the Inns-of-Court and the Justinian Society, and she is the current first-vice president of the DuPage Association of Women Lawyers. As such, Michelle has the knowledge and conviction to state, "We have a lot of smart, tough, no-nonsense women in this profession, in this county. I am privileged to know many of them, to have worked with them, and to consider them my friends."

It goes without saying, that Michelle Moore should consider herself a component of that group.

Audrey Skiera



Audrey Skiera

For Audrey Skiera, the only natural step after becoming an accountant was to become an attorney. After graduating from Boston College with a degree in accounting, Audrey returned to Illinois where she worked as an Operations Consultant and Director of Operations at Oakbrook Bank. It was there that she studied for the CPA exam, and realizing that there was a huge section of tax on the exam, decided to go to law school.

Audrey actually took and passed the CPA exam during her first year of law school at Loyola. While in law school, Audrey served as the executive editor of the Loyola Consumer Law Review, and spent a summer studying international law and international business transactions in Rome, Italy.

After graduating law school in 2002, Audrey began working at Huck Bouma, P.C., where she interned summers prior. There, she practices in Estate Planning and Administration. The draw to this area for Audrey was that it involves many income tax related issues..

Audrey remarks that she does see a lot of women in this area of law. Audrey believes that women are drawn to this area because Estate Planning demands a certain amount of compassion. It involves working with families to plan for life's most difficult moments. For instance, if there is a disabled child in the family, Audrey will help to create a trust that will support that child long after his parents are gone. And each family has their own unique dynamics.

Additionally, Audrey comments that this transactional area of law lends itself to a better, more flexible schedule because it is not governed by litigation and court imposed deadlines. And Audrey certainly knows first hand how invaluable a flexible work schedule can be. She is married to index-funds trader Jeff Skiera, and has 2 small children, Renee, 3 1/2, and Nathan, 2. After having kids, she was able to work only 2 days a week. As time went on, she gradually eased back into things by adding one day at a time, and is now up to an 80% work schedule of four days a week.

Audrey's secret to keeping it together is actually to keep things separate. Her personal life and her professional life that is. However, that's not to say that Audrey won't be found drafting a trust while her little ones are asleep in the next room. Because sometimes that's what it takes to be a woman in the law.

Kimberly Davis

You never would have thought that the spunky fourteen year old kid, slinging sauerkraut and pork behind the counter at Manny Pearl's restaurant in Cicero would eventually grow up to be the accomplished and esteemed attorney that she is today. Kimberly Davis began her life in that working-class Chicago suburb, growing up with her parents, brother and sister. There she learned the importance of honesty, loyalty, hard work, and a good sense of humor.



Kimberly Davis

And work hard she did. After graduating from Morton East High School, Kim attended Morton Jr. College, earning an A.A. degree in commerce. She then went on to Southern Illinois University at Carbondale where she majored in Paralegal Studies and a minored Political Science, graduating with a Bachelors of Science.

After school, Kim worked for the downtown Chicago law firm of Fisher & Fisher, where she was hired to draft pleadings. She advanced within the firm to become a paralegal, then paralegal supervisor, then general office manager. Realizing she had reached the end of the line for career advancements without a law degree, Kim went ahead and obtained a law degree. She started attending law school in the evenings at IIT Chicago-Kent Law School. She worked full time during the day and used vacation time to study for exams.

In 1997, Kim got her first job as an attorney, prosecuting subrogation cases at the Park Ridge law firm of Knight, Hoppe, Fanning & Knight, Ltd. There, she had a caseload of roughly 450 files. After the firm's subrogation department closed in 1999, Kim moved her career to DuPage County when she joined the law firm of Momkus McCluskey.

Kim is now a partner at Momkus McCluskey, where she is a supervisor of the Insurance Department, working primarily on insurance defense (auto, premise liability), large loss subrogation, and special investigations. Kim also handles an occasional commercial litigation and plaintiff's bodily injury case. She has resolved cases through just about every means offered by the law, including jury trial, bench trial, arbitration, mediation, and settlement. There is also an administrative aspect of her job, where she handles a great deal of marketing and management.

Kim comments that the majority of attorneys in her field are men, specifically pointing to the disproportionately low number of women practicing over ten years. She believes there is an advantage to being a woman in the law because it adds diversity, which is becoming more critical for both law firms and clients. However, she points that women have not yet reached gender equality, or parity, in positions of management in this profession. That being said, she does not think it is more difficult to be a woman in the law than a man, even though she herself is a single mother of a 3 year-old, Katherine Elizabeth.

Kim explains, "All lawyers, notwithstanding gender, have at least some responsibilities away from the profession. Men and women both have stressors, expectations, and burdens that are individual, familial and/or societal. Sometimes men and women deal with the responsibilities and stress the same way, sometimes they don't. It depend upon the individual and we should all strive for balance."

That being said, Kim encourages women to strive for achieving positions of leadership such as partner, managing partner, corporate manager, or judge. Kim intends to continue to strive for the same.

Emily Carrara

Emily Carrara is the senior associate at Sullivan Taylor & Gumina, a family and divorce law firm in Wheaton, Illinois. Emily graduated from Boston University in 1993 with a B.A. in political science. She then went out into the world as a paralegal. Not satisfied with that career, and knowing she could make a difference in the legal system, Emily attended John Marshall Law School, where she graduated with honors in 2001. While in law school, Emily served in the divorce division of the Cook County Office of the Public Guardian. She also participated in moot court and a family law competition in the State of New York.



Emily Carrara

Emily has handled many aspects of the difficult field of family, from divorces and custody battles, to untangling financial assets, to grandparent visitation. In fact, last year, Emily argued a grandparent visitation case before the Illinois Supreme Court. Emily found the toughest aspect of being female attorney to be a lesser degree of respect afforded to female attorneys. Emily believes that has and continues to change, given the rise in the number of female attorneys, as well as the increased prominence of women in our judiciary and our bar association.

The best advice she ever received was to "tell the truth, be true to your ideals, and don't allow yourself to be bullied." While she would also offer that advice to younger female attorneys, she would add that female attorneys, as well as any attorney, should challenge conventional thinking and be creative in representing your clients while holding true to your ethical obligations. Also, Emily adds that family is important, and never to be neglected in exchange for your career. Emily met her husband in law school and she has little toddler boy whose pictures adorn her office. Emily smiled as she looked on her admission certificate to the bar of the United States Supreme Court, a sense of accomplishment washing over her at a career that matters.

Elizabeth Pope

Elizabeth Pope

Elizabeth Pope always knew she wanted to work in the field of family law. She felt it was were she was called to serve. In 1992, she graduated from St. Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana where she received her degree in political science and English literature. After college, she worked in a small law firm. When the family law call rang louder, Elizabeth went on to Thomas Cooley Law School, where she received her J.D. in 1999.



Elizabeth Pope

One of Elizabeth's first interviews was with the late John Panegasser and his firm. She was hired and has worked there ever since. Eventually, in 2006 when John Panegasser became Judge Panegasser, Elizabeth bought the firm from him and took over the entire practice. Currently, Elizabeth focuses about 75% of her work on family law issues. The remaining 25% of her work falls into the residential real estate arena, with the occasional simple estate planning clients there too.

Elizabeth believes that women have made great contributions to the field of law and have taken on greater responsibility in our legal system. Specifically, she notes that 4 of the leadership positions in the Circuit Court for the Eighteenth Judicial Circuit are held by women (Chief Judge Jorgensen, Presiding Judge Wheaton – Chancery, Presiding Judge Webster – Law, Presiding Judge Creswell – Criminal). One problem she believes female attorneys face is the misconstruing of friendly and collegial attitudes towards other attorneys, noting specifically that clients, and even opposing counsel, may misconstrue such friendship as a dereliction of duties to the client. To the elder female attorneys, Elizabeth encourages these attorneys to look at the practice of law through a different lens and remember what pratfalls you encountered when you were younger. To the younger female attorneys, she advises them to strike a balance between work and personal lives, avoiding things that overwhelm you. ■

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