

Legal Ladies *Mother and daughter serve up law and life the Delaney way*

by Sheri Riley Roman

photography by Stephen Hill

A few weeks ago, Kathleen DeLaney asked her mother to watch her children for an hour or so while she ran an errand - a typical request in the lives of mothers and daughters. When she returned, she found her children, along with the neighbor's children and her mother, playing three-on-three basketball. Kathleen asked the score and was told it was, "fun-all." Ann DeLaney was the grandmother hooping it up with the kids.

Ann is a high-profile woman and Kathleen is hardly living in her mother's shadow. Like most mother-daughter relationships, they have navigated through twists and turns. Today, they are partners of DeLaney & DeLaney Law, LLC, where they both get to hone their skills and provide valuable legal expertise to their clients.

A family affair

The practice of law runs deep in the DeLaney family. Edward DeLaney, who is Ann's husband and Kathleen's father, recently joined the firm as a partner after retiring from Barnes & Thornburg where he'd practiced since 1973. Tim DeLaney, Kathleen's brother, is currently finishing his law degree and studying for the Indiana bar exam. Kathleen's husband, James Strenski, is an attorney and partner at Bingham McHale, LLP, and Ed and Ann's other daughter, Jennifer DeLaney, M.D., is a physician in St. Louis. "We're not sure how Jennifer escaped the law and ended up as a doctor," Kathleen says.

Although her official legal education was earned when she graduated from the Indiana University School of Law in 1995, Kathleen has vivid memories of an earlier law education. "If there was a child care snafu, I would sometimes go with my dad to his classes at Harvard Law School," she says. "A few years later, I remember going to law classes with my mother as well." Her childhood often included dinner conversations about issues related to her parents' current cases and causes.

Starting a business is a daunting challenge. The idea of working with a parent or child can be especially intimidating, but the DeLanays approached the endeavor with eyes wide open. Their easygoing relationship has made the partnership a smooth transition. "Certain clients are drawn by my parents' name or their reputation in the community," Kathleen says. "There are also certain clients or parts of the practice that are a more natural fit for me. Among us, we have the bases covered."

The law offices of DeLaney & DeLaney are warm and inviting. After spending a couple of years in a location downtown, the DeLaney's faced limited space with their rapid growth. They decided to buy and renovate one of the historic homes on Washington Boulevard. The remodeling project came on the heels of Kathleen, her husband and three children (Emma, 10; Kevin, 7; and John, 5) living with Ann and Ed while their own home was being renovated. Prior to that, Ann and Ed had just remodeled their home. "This was Ed's idea," Ann says. "It did take a lot of work, but it's been great for all of us."

This is especially true for Kathleen, whose children are in school less than a mile away and who lives less than two miles away. "I can work until 2:55 p.m. and still pick up my kids at 3 p.m.," she says. "I figure I'm saving at least a half-hour each day in commuting time and not waiting for elevators or looking for a parking spot. Over the course of a year, that's a significant chunk of time."

The remodeling also allowed for accommodations to make the office family friendly. There's a playroom in the basement that comes in handy for times when paperwork conflicts with school vacations or other child care challenges.

Circle of life

Relationships between mothers and daughters are notoriously complex. The DeLaney family is no different. Both recall moments of Kathleen's teenage years as complicated. Ann remembers Kathleen's desire to get out of Indiana. "I can remember thinking that I have to get her off to school," Ann recalls.

After college and foreign service in London for a couple of years, Kathleen got the wanderlust out of her system and was anxious to return to Indiana. She and her husband knew they wanted to raise their future children with the closeness and support of family.

A relationship that works

According to SeniorJournal.com (November 2005), ties between mothers and adult daughters are strong and enduring. Mothers continue to influence, and daughters continue to seek their mother's approval. As daughters age, mothers can find a new friend and confidante. With age comes acceptance, and the relationship can blossom on a new level. As daughters become mothers themselves, there is often a new appreciation for the journey that their own mothers have taken. It has all worked out wonderfully in the DeLaneys' case.

Ann, Ed and Kathleen are partners in DeLaney & DeLaney. The firm also has three associates. As managing partner, Kathleen handles the logistics of running the firm. Details like payroll and taxes fall under her jurisdiction. However, major decisions are made with a consensus among the partners.

Kathleen says she became managing partner by default. "Mom already had two other jobs and Dad was still working at Barnes & Thornburg," she says.

Ed joined DeLaney & DeLaney in 2005, and Kathleen says he endured a little culture shock. "Well, first of all, he was a man. In addition to that, he came from this large firm environment where they had a copy center, a library and a tremendous support staff," she says. "This firm was definitely an adjustment for him."

Kathleen's brother also worked for the firm for one summer, but it was the general consensus that the family harmony would be better if Tim didn't have to answer to Kathleen. "There was no jealousy or envy," she says. "I think it was just hard for him to have me as his boss."

Any new business venture requires a leap of faith. It also requires a sturdy plan and some common sense. With the gift of hindsight, Kathleen and Ann recall the early days of cultivating this partnership. They covered financial issues, logistics and the vision they both share today.

Kathleen says she knew her likelihood of success would be greatly enhanced by partnering with someone of tremendous legal stature and reputation.

Ann acknowledges the benefits of partners she can trust and a business relationship born of love, trust and familiarity. "We probably know too much," she says. "Sometimes we have to say 'Enough!' when we get sidetracked with a case or another issue."

The message that clearly comes through is these are two women who enjoy working together and building a law firm based on a solid family foundation.

Communication is the key to making this partnership work. Perhaps due to the rigors of practicing law, verbal ability is not lacking in the DeLaney firm. Ann and Kathleen agree that no issue should be allowed to fester. The best advice they can give any partnership, whether it's marriage, family or business, is to calmly put the issues on the table and talk through them.

Away from the office

Beyond the working relationship, the DeLaney family is close-knit in many ways. Ed and Ann are fixtures at the grandchildren's sporting events and school programs. They are involved in most aspects of their children's and grandchildren's lives. For years, the family vacationed on Hilton Head Island, S.C., and this year the entire clan is going to Ireland.

Friends also are an important balance. Ed and Ann have maintained friendships with other couples for decades and make it a point to keep in touch. Kathleen is still close with girlfriends from her childhood and college years. She and her husband also have numerous couples with young children who make up their circle of friends.

Other than her family, Ann's proudest association is with the Julian Center, where she serves as executive director. A United Way Agency, the Julian Center serves the community by providing counseling, safe shelter and other services for women and children who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. The shelter provides housing for more than 1,100 women and children annually. Hundreds more women and children participate in therapy at the Counseling Center.

"When I first started with the Julian Center, we were turning away more people than we were serving," Ann says. "Now we've built this incredible entity and we're serving quadruple the number of people." The center has expanded the outreach services and recently served as a model for other family justice centers around the country.

In addition to her devotion to the Julian Center and serving as a Standing Trustee for Chapter 13 Bankruptcy in the southern district of Indiana, Ann is a well-known fixture in politics. "I always thought politics was a way to make an impact and to make things better," she says.

Ann appears as a panelist on the weekly political roundtable television show *Indiana Week in Review* and authored two editions of the book *Politics for Dummies*, published by IDG Books Worldwide. She also served as the chairman of the Indiana Democratic party and was the campaign manager for Evan Bayh's reelection campaign in 1992.

Both Ann and Kathleen remember the rigors of the political life - from the campaign trail to the intrusive questions. "At that time in our culture, it was OK for a reporter to ask who was at home watching the children," Ann recalls. "It was a different time."

Kathleen remembers some of the sad days. "It wasn't just whether or not you won the race - there were a lot of unpleasant and unnecessary questions that would've never been posed to a man. I don't think I could put myself out there like she did," Kathleen says, who figures maybe she just experienced the political calling earlier and in a different way.

As a first grade student at St. Thomas Aquinas, while her father

was a candidate for City-County Council, Kathleen was faced with boarding the school bus with a driver who wore a bright and prominent button for the opponent. She refused to board the bus and walked to school from that day forward.

Kathleen is more low-key in her contributions to the community. She's been active in political campaigns, albeit in roles behind the scenes. With three young children and a thriving law practice, her plate is full. She is quick to point out that her husband and her family have made it possible to keep her busy life on course.

Ann adds that Kathleen is extremely organized and detail oriented. In separate discussions, they each labeled the other a "type A personality."

With a chuckle, Ann also comments that Kathleen's oldest child, Emma, is even more of a type A personality than either of them. "If I'm supposed to pick her up at school, she used to call me the

night before to remind me," Ann says. "Then she would call me the morning of to remind me again. Sometimes Kathleen and I look at her and take a collective deep breath."

A full schedule doesn't mean there isn't time for dreams and plans. While she doesn't have a lot of time for hobbies, Kathleen does have plans. "If I'm calculating correctly, I'll be about 52 years old when my youngest heads off to college," she says. "I would love to retire early and spend time traveling with my husband." A couple of her dream destinations are Australia and New Zealand.

In the meantime, Kathleen enjoys reading fiction, a habit that was ingrained early in her childhood. "I was the proud owner of the entire Nancy Drew series," she says. Today she still leans toward murder mysteries, often with a female protagonist.

For exercise, running is Ann's release. She took up the sport in 1996 and continues today, for fitness and for pleasure.

Trendsetting

DeLaney & DeLaney is part of a growing trend of family-owned, female-headed firms. According to the University of San Francisco (through Mercury News), nearly half of all privately held companies in the U.S. are 50 percent or more female-owned, based on a study conducted by the Center for Women's Business Research. About 34 percent of family-controlled firms projected that their next CEO would be a woman. That's a 17 percent increase compared with data from 1997.

"The fact that we're a female-owned firm has been a benefit for us with certain clients," Ann says. "It may help us get a foot in the door, but after that, you have to do a good job. It can be a differentiating point between our firm and other firms under consideration."

These are two women with lots of options. Why would they choose to take on the long hours, headaches and struggles of their own business, along with family obligations and an ongoing litany of other commitments? One simple reason: Their partnership is a good fit. They respect each other's experience and skills. They value the strengths each brings to the business. Plus, they know each other extremely well and honor their shared background and family ties.

Ann credits her own parents and childhood as an example of her steady foundation. She and Ed provided the same for their own children, and that continues today. "I don't think people understand how close we all are, how many family dinners we have or how many ballgames we attend," Ann says. "I certainly care about the law and this community, but I have spent most of my time mentoring my children."

As we celebrate Mother's Day this month, we also acknowledge the complex and multi-dimensional relationship between mothers and children. Kathleen says her biggest childhood lesson was, "You can't win if you don't play the game."

Ann reflects on her life adventures and says, "I'd rather be shot as a lion than a lamb."

Both are good mottos to keep in mind.

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