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PEOPLE TO WATCH

Kimberly Surratt: Attorney brings people together

BY LINDA KAY HARDIE
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Attorneys don't have the best of reputations in today's society. Family law attorneys, dealing with divorce, after often seen as sharks.

But that's just the opposite of how people see Kimberly Surratt. She worked to bring collaborative divorce to Northern Nevada. It's not a unique idea, but it is a relatively new one, especially in Nevada.

Surratt is co-chair of Collaborative Professionals of Nevada, along with Lisa Wright in Las Vegas. Collaborative divorce is a process where couples and their attorneys agree to cooperate in finding solutions outside the courtroom. This process not only uses family law attorneys to reach a settlement, but also other professionals, including mental health professionals and financial planners.

Surratt's partner, Caren Jenkins, said that Surratt discovered the idea of collaborative divorce on the Internet and helped get it going in Nevada. She did this while working at The Jenkins Law Office and volunteering with the Reno Rodeo and Make-A-Wish Foundation of Northern Nevada, as well as having a private life.

"She's a pretty amazing young woman," Jenkins said. "She's an achiever. She's certainly earned everything she's gotten throughout her life."

Jenkins said that Surratt is rather young to be a partner, but she's earned it.

"I was surprised I did it (made her a partner) as early as I did," Jenkins said. "Kim somehow has jammed an awful lot of experience into her years. She's done such a good job I didn't want to lose her."

Many of Surratt's colleagues comment on the combination of her youth and her abilities.

One of the financial planners involved in CPN is Richard Teichner, a CPA and director at Barnard Vogler & Co.

"She is a self starter and she probably takes on more than she should, but she's got boundless energy," Teichner said. "Because she's bright and is a quick study, I think she is the equivalent of somebody who's had many more years experience."

Jenkins said she's excited about the collaborative process and Surratt's role in it.

"Kim's leading the charge throughout the state," she said. "I'm really proud of her. When a

NOMINATIONS

Do you know of an up-and-coming, interesting Northern Nevada businessman or businesswoman who people should keep an eye out for in the community? This would be someone who isn't quite the top CEO, president or head executive — but could be in the coming years. If so, e-mail us at business@rgj.com with the information — including the subject's name, title, company/organization, town and telephone number.

person finds something they're passionate about, it's a blessing, it's a gift. I wish I could find mine, and I wish I could've found it in my 20s."

Surratt said what she likes about collaborative is that it involves working with others to come up with a solution everyone can agree on.

"You don't pretend to have all the answers," Surratt said. "It's nice to have other professionals helping. It's what we're growing toward in our firm, a very holistic approach."

She also said it's healthier for families to work together on ending a marriage, rather than to battle in a courtroom.

Jenkins said it's Surratt's sociology degree that helps her with that viewpoint.

"While she is a rabid litigator and has all the skills to do that, she's way ahead of her time in that she sees that an adversarial approach is not always necessary," Jenkins said.

Attorney Casey Campbell, who also works with CPN, agreed with that assessment.

"A lot of lawyers' training is toward litigation and the adversarial process," she said. "For me it was hard to make that switch. But for Kim it didn't seem to be hard."

Surratt said she decided to study law when she was in Costa Rica during her undergraduate work. She met a woman who did human rights work, and it appealed to Surratt, with all her people skills.

She started out in insurance defense law at the Law Offices of Perry and Spann.

"I could do it, but it just didn't do it for me. Family law touched on a lot more for me," Surratt said. "They allowed me to start playing with family law, which was probably the biggest mistake they made, because I wanted to do only that."

Not that she's limited herself to her work. She rides cutting horses — something that runs in the family — and she runs marathons. She also enjoys working on the boards of the Reno Rodeo and Make-A-Wish Foundation of



PHOTOS BY DAVID B. PARKER/RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL

Lawyer Kimberly Surratt of Jenkins Law Office helps divorcing couples find personal legal solutions outside of the courtroom.

BIO BOX

Name/age: Kimberly Surratt, 29.
Hometown: Born in Grants, New Mexico; raised in Winnemucca.
Position: Partner, The Jenkins Law Office.
Career: Partner, Jenkins Law Office, 2005-'06; attorney, The Jenkins Law Office, 2004-'05; attorney, Law Offices of Perry and Spann, 2002-'04.
Education: Bachelor of arts, sociology, University of Nevada, Reno, 1999; doctor of jurisprudence, Golden Gate University, 2002.
Professional associations: Collaborative Professionals of Nevada; International Academy of Collaborative Professionals; Northern Nevada Women Lawyers Association; Washoe County Bar Association.
Volunteer: Washoe County High School Mock Trial; Reno Rodeo Association; Make-A-Wish Foundation of Northern Nevada; various pro bono legal work.
Family: Husband, Brett Tierney.
Hobbies: Riding cutting horses, skiing, running marathons.
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Northern Nevada.

"I love Northern Nevada," Surratt said. "I especially like rural Nevada. Make-A-Wish needed help in Winnemucca, Ely, Elko, the rural areas, and it's easy for me to help them with that."

Jenkins said she doesn't see anything unusual about all these different aspects of Surratt's life.

"I think it all fits together very well," Jenkins said. "Make-A-Wish and the rodeo and working in the community is all about making the world a better place." With everything else Surratt



is up to, Campbell said that she is also a leader in gay rights and partner's rights.

"Kim's one of the main movers in Northern Nevada on that

issue," Campbell said. "She's very creative and innovative, which you have to be in that field because the law doesn't protect very much."