

Oakland County Legal News

www.legalnews.com/oakland

Serving the Oakland County Legal Community Since 1927

Troy, Michigan — Friday May 2, 2014

BALANCING ACT: BUSINESS LITIGATOR KNOWS ALL ABOUT DAILY CHALLENGES

Tom Kirvan | Legal News

Almost by definition, a complex business litigation attorney must be a multi-tasker, someone who excels at juggling a host of legal challenges at once, seemingly impervious to the inherent risks of such practices.

Sara MacWilliams, a 35-year-old attorney with Young & Associates in Farmington Hills, is beyond busy, however. Her caseload of commercial litigation work – which focuses on such issues as “health care, contracts, trade secrets and intellectual property, and business torts” – is just part of a daily juggling act that would make most heads spin. A graduate of Kalamazoo College and the University of Michigan Law School, MacWilliams also is a mother of four with a fifth child on the way this summer.

“Balancing my work responsibilities with motherhood is a special sort of challenge, but I fortunately have a very good network of support that makes it all come together each day,” said

has been ingrained in me since my first real job working at a pizza shop. It was a great learning experience that has stuck with me as my career has developed.”

Her husband, Kris, whom she married while in law school, has been on a similarly demanding career track, serving as an emergency room physician for the past six years after graduating from Wayne State University School of Medicine. Creative scheduling helps allow the couple to shoulder their child-rearing responsibilities, tending to the needs of three boys (Freddy, 7, and Henry and Gabe, 5-year-old twins) as well as their adopted daughter (19-year-old Emily).

MacWilliams, who grew up in the Union Lake area, joined Young & Associates in 2007 after spending several years as an associate with Howard & Howard in Royal Oak. She began work with the firm just months after her first child was born.

“We approach all cases as if they will head to trial and we fully expect to win if indeed they reach there,” MacWilliams said. “We have to go in with that mindset, knowing that our clients expect the best out of us. It is our goal to deliver results.”

–Sara MacWilliams

MacWilliams, whose mother lives nearby and is a social worker. “It definitely has its moments, especially when I’m in trial or in the final preparations for trial, but the ability to multi-task

“I knew it was going to be a tough transition after becoming a mother for the first time, but everyone was very supportive as I got up to speed with the new firm,” MacWilliams said,



An attorney with Young & Associates for nearly seven years, Sara MacWilliams strikes a balance between her career and family life. (Photo by Robert Chase)

offering special words of praise for the firm’s founder, Rodger Young. “He has been great from the beginning, offering support and guidance on how best to handle challenging situations.”

Young, who founded his firm in 1990 after spending nearly two decades as an acclaimed litigator with a Detroit firm, prefers not to be cast in the role of mentor, even though he sports a global view of legal life that has been widely beneficial. In 2007-08, he served as a U.S. delegate to the United Nations General Assembly. A veteran of the U.S. Air Force, Young was one

of five delegates appointed by then President George W. Bush, and was assigned the task of helping redesign the internal justice system for the U.N. One of the goals of the redesign, according to Young, was to place greater emphasis on informal resolution of disputes before they escalate to the stage of expensive and time-consuming litigation.

But a mentor he is not, for he insists that those on his hand-picked team of five attorneys come ready to do battle on any legal stage.

Said Young: "I look for talent, those who have gone to some of the best law schools in the country, and who write and speak exceedingly well . . . I hire attorneys who don't need to have their hands held and who know their way around a courtroom and complex litigation matters."

Such as MacWilliams, who currently is working with Young in a high-stakes class action case that is scheduled to be tried in

Detroit federal court. The firm is representing the Detroit Medical Center, which is alleged to have conspired with other hospitals to fix the wages of thousands of registered nurses dating back to 2002. Several other hospitals already have agreed to settlements.

But MacWilliams and Young are busy preparing for a trial and are of no mind to settle. In fact, one facet of the case already is on appeal to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit.

MacWilliams, whose father was a teacher, was a star student at Kalamazoo College, graduating summa cum laude, earning a degree in history with a minor in Chinese language studies. She spent a year in the most populous country on earth, receiving a degree from Beijing Language and Cultural University.

While at U-M Law School, MacWilliams served as associate editor of the Michigan Journal of International Law. In 2013, she was

honored as an "Up & Coming Lawyer" by Michigan Lawyers Weekly, while from 2010-12 she was named a Michigan Super Lawyers "Rising Star." In 2013, she also was named a "Michigan Super Lawyer" as well as a "Top Women Lawyer" in Commercial Litigation by Hour Magazine.

The honors, while nice, are a far cry from the "adrenaline rush" she got when helping a client obtain a \$4 million jury award over a contentious business dispute along with \$1 million in attorney fees.

"It was a 'bet the farm' type case that was very emotional for all of us involved in the trial," MacWilliams said. "There were probably a dozen witnesses who testified in the case and when the jury delivered the verdict, it was a feeling that was hard to put into words. Let's just say we were all overjoyed." ■
