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Turnabout: Litigator returns to her legal roots

By TOM KIRVAN
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After seeing the bright lights of Los Angeles and Chicago as a summer associate, Jaye Quadrozzi was virtually certain of one thing as she embarked upon her legal career.

"I'm never going to work in Michigan," Quadrozzi said at the time, repeating the statement for full effect some 27 years later.

The Great Lakes State, after all, has for years watched helplessly as many of its finest law school graduates headed for "greener pastures," drawn by the lure of better pay and the bustle of big city life with a major firm.

And yet, Quadrozzi had a change of heart in 2007, joining the then Southfield-based firm of Young & Associates, a boutique that specializes in complex commercial litigation. The firm, now headquartered in the Orchards Corporate Center in Farmington Hills, was founded in 1990 by prominent Detroit attorney Rodger Young, a successful trial lawyer who has served as a U.S. delegate to the United Nations General Assembly.

"As they say, "never say never," particularly when it comes to your chosen career," Quadrozzi said of the bold prediction from her law school days at the University of Michigan.

The move was prompted in large part by a desire to be near her mother, Carole, who had been diagnosed with cancer, a form of Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma that responded well to treatment.

"If there is a cancer to "get," that is the one," Quadrozzi said. "It is treatable and the results are generally very good."

Quadrozzi's ties to her family are particularly strong, and she credits her parents for instilling the importance of "working hard" and "obtaining a solid education." Her parents, who will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary next year, met while attending North Adams State Teachers College in the Berkshire Mountains of northwestern Massachusetts.

"They were the first in their families to go to college and upon graduating they moved to Detroit for teaching jobs that were paying \$5,000 a year, which was a big salary for teachers in the 1950s," Quadrozzi said.

Her father, Tom, now 89, would eventually leave the teaching ranks to become a school principal, while her mother, who turned 80 this year, retired as an associate superintendent from Roseville Community Schools.



An attorney with Young & Associates, Jaye Quadrozzi in her spare time serves on the board of the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority.

Photo by Robert Chase

Their daughter earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy from U-M in 1985, obtaining her J.D. from the U-M Law School in

1988. She joined the Chicago-based firm of Kirkland & Ellis, spending the first five years of her legal career honing her litigation skills in a series of trademark and copyright infringement cases involving high-profile clients such as Warner Brothers.

“I gained a lot of trial experience during that time because of the expedited schedule in obtaining restraining orders,” Quadrozzi explained. “We were constantly going to court to protect trademarks related to the Batman movies, as well as products manufactured by our clients GM and Chanel. I was really thrown into the fire early, working to stop the spread of fake items and knockoffs in the marketplace. Counterfeit items were springing up everywhere and it was our job to stop them from eroding the sales of the licensed products.”

After working out of Kirkland’s Los Angeles office for several years, Quadrozzi returned to the Windy City, joining the law firm of Katten Muchin & Zavis, where she became a partner. At Katten, Quadrozzi specialized in intellectual property work and complex commercial litigation, areas in which she continues to focus with Young & Associates.

“This was such a natural place for me to land when I returned to Michigan,” Quadrozzi said. “This is a firm that specializes in handling complex cases, the kind where the stakes are high and the issues compelling.”

She has teamed with the firm’s founder, whose experience includes a George W. Bush presidential appointment to serve at the U.N. General Assembly from 2007–08, on a number of “high-level” cases involving trade secrets, patent infringement, and complex contractual matters.

“We have defended a number of auto suppliers as well as entrepreneurs involved in start-up companies, and it is heartening to help them achieve the legal satisfaction they deserve,” Quadrozzi said. “I have been fortunate to work side-by-side with Rodger on a number of these cases, and he is absolutely the best, a real master at articulating a point

and conveying the message to the jury.”

Last month, Young and Quadrozzi scored a major legal win in a Delaware court when a state judge ruled that Nationwide Corp., an Ohio-based insurance and investment giant, breached several provisions of a 2007 deal with NorthPointe Capital, a Michigan financial firm headquartered in Troy. Judge Andrea L. Rocanelli, of the Superior Court of Delaware, ordered Nationwide to pay NorthPointe

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\$15.2 million for the breach, which nearly crippled the Michigan company’s investment business after it was launched 7 years ago.

“We could not be more gratified with Judge Rocanelli’s ruling,” Young said last month. “Her recognition of Nationwide’s culpability brings to a close what has been a true David and Goliath conflict . . . When you consider that NorthPointe is a very small, employee-owned firm, and that Nationwide is one of the most massive and recognized corporations in the nation, it brings a certain poignancy to our success.”

Several weeks before the ruling was announced, Quadrozzi said the 5-year legal battle had been much more than a test of wills.

“Our clients literally had millions of dollars taken away from them when Nationwide violated the terms of the spinoff agreement,” Quadrozzi said. “Despite losing

all of that business during that time, they kept their firm afloat, which is a testament to their dedication and commitment.”

Quadrozzi can relate well to such business smarts. Her two sons, Augustus and Maxwell, have inherited her business acumen. Her older son, now 24, works for a hedge fund in New York after graduating from Columbia University with a degree in mathematics. His brother, also a Birmingham Brother Rice grad, is a junior at U-M in the prestigious Ross School of Business.

“I want to be both of my children,” Quadrozzi said with a smile.

They would be wise to follow the lead of their mother, whose successful legal career has been complemented by her community involvement. Last year, Quadrozzi was appointed by the Oakland County Board of Commissioners as its representative to the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority Board.

“The Metropark system includes some of the most beautiful parks in the state, and I have been honored to serve on its governing board,” said Quadrozzi, who once was a lifeguard at Metro Beach. “John McCulloch, who was named the executive director in 2012, is committed to taking the Metroparks to the next level and I want to be a part of making that happen.”

Quadrozzi is a frequent visitor to many of the system’s 13 well-tended parks, enjoying their scenic trails for her marathon training runs. A fitness buff, Quadrozzi regularly competes in marathons and triathlons, and currently is gearing up for the New York City Marathon this fall.

“I generally compete in two marathons a year and I’m really excited about running New York,” said Quadrozzi, who has 17 marathons to her credit. “I ran in the Big Sur Marathon in April and I want to try the Wine Country Marathon next year.”

“As a lawyer, I am expected to win,” she said. “As a runner, I have an altogether different outlook: I just want to participate. It is my release mechanism.” ■
