

COMMUNITY PROFILE: New county bar president sees membership 'changing'



Les Stukenberg/
The Daily Courier

Originally Published: January 19, 2010 9:54 p.m.

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Jennifer Campbell sees the climate for women lawyers changing for the better as more of them join the profession.

Campbell, 39, the new president of the 150-member Yavapai County Bar Association, is also active in the Arizona Women Lawyers Association.

"My first volunteer job was to reinvigorate AWLA in northern Arizona," she said. That group now has about 30 active members. The judges in Yavapai County are also very supportive of the women who practice law before them, she added.

"Right now it's a 51 percent female-to-male ratio in most law schools," she said. "That's had a huge impact. But women don't, by-and-large, practice here. That 50-50 split is not reflected in our (bar association) membership or in this area. But that's changing. We've got some fabulous women who practice law here."

Campbell went to the University of Texas Law School after going through a divorce and began practicing at 30. A Prescott resident, she has two sons, Justin, 19, and Jackson, 15.

"I became a lawyer to help people," Campbell said. "When they are faced with criminal, civil or domestic cases, people are overwhelmed. One of the greatest things lawyers can do is navigate the process because the process is not intuitive."

Drunk driving penalties are particularly hard.

"I do a public service show called 'Yavapai News and Views,'" she said. That show, on Channel 13, included a series on driving while intoxicated. "It's important for people to understand that you can get a DUI if you're on prescription medication if the medication impairs your ability to operate a motor vehicle to the slightest degree," she said. That can be a problem with an aging population in Prescott, many of whom are taking prescription medications.

There are five levels of misdemeanor DUI charges in Arizona. Driving under the influence with a child under 15 or a DUI with a suspended license are felonies. With the suspended license, a class-four felony, the sentence requires four months in jail as a condition of probation. Campbell said she does not believe that some of the consequences for DUI are what the state Legislature intended, such as offenders

who lose their jobs and subsequently their homes. Also, even if the person is sentenced to work release, their driver's license is suspended and the jail is in Camp Verde, likely far from their place of employment. And on top of that, they must pay at least \$1,500 in fines. Those sent to jail have to reimburse the county \$60 a day for their room and board.

"I don't believe that people should drive while under the influence of alcohol," Campbell said. "I do believe they should have a consequence if they choose to do so. But how much of a consequence makes sense? Losing your job, your house, your car? And I've seen all of that happen. And I don't think the Legislature intended for people's entire lives to be destroyed as a result of a first-time mistake."

In domestic relations law, a state bar association committee is looking at changes in child support, custody and visitation to keep up with situations that affect divorcing couples. The committee wants the Legislature to "revamp the child support calculator so that children in divorced families have sufficient resources," she said. High unemployment is wreaking havoc on health insurance for children and the state's program for uninsured children is falling victim of budget cuts.

The economy has also led to increased civil lawsuits and to more bankruptcy filings, Campbell said.

Campbell, a former deputy county attorney who also practiced civil law with Prescott lawyer Alex Vakula, said being a member of the bar association brings valuable comity to lawyers and is "a great networking opportunity."

"Law is a very solitary activity," she said. "I think it's a lot like doctors where you go to work, you work in your office and you go home. The bar provides an opportunity for lawyers to get together and get to know one another, which makes it a much more collegial working environment. That's something you don't get in the larger venues.

"When I get a case, nine times out of 10, I have spoken to the lawyer on the other side before I call him," Campbell added. "I've met him outside the adversarial process so it makes it easier to be in a dialogue. When you have a relationship with other practitioners, it helps the process move more smoothly."

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