

# RES IPSA

UMKC School of Law Alumni Magazine | 2020

## Family Matters

With creativity and compassion, UMKC Law School  
and alumni elevate the practice of family law









# Family Court in Action

UMKC grads work in every aspect of the family law system

*Clockwise, from the left: Megan Roth, Kea Bird-Riley, Lori Stipp, Erin Bajackson, Ashley Aramjoo, Darrell Smith, Mary Kay O'Malley, Ayyoub Ajmi and his daughter. Left to right on the wall: Sandy Wirtel on screen; memorial portraits of Michael Albano and Irene Downs.*





## UMKC SCHOOL OF LAW MEETS THE CHALLENGES OF THE TIMES

It seems like a long time ago when we first began to plan this issue of *Res Ipsa*: before a pandemic forced us apart, disrupting nearly every aspect of our life, and before a video of a Black man killed over an excruciating span of minutes caused our nation to stop and consider generations of racial injustice.

We have always known the critical importance of the work we do here at UMKC School of Law to families and children. Today we know that even more.

As the pandemic has forced families into physical isolation, it has also brought into stark relief how families shape and are shaped by our society and how

the legal system is critical to sustaining our families. When schools and daycares close and parents are required to balance homeschooling their children with working from home, we realize how critical our childcare and education systems are, not only to the care and education of the next generation but to every aspect of our lives. When death and illness from the pandemic strike most heavily our elders and our communities of color, we are challenged to look closely at the social determinants of health in our society that may make this so. As courts have had to close their doors and open virtually, we have come to realize how much access to our courts is critical to providing safety to vulnerable family members subject to abuse in their homes.

In this issue of *Res Ipsa* we celebrate the work our faculty, students and alumni do to represent children and families and to improve the legal system for these families. The attorneys and programs highlighted here are just a tiny sample of the hundreds of alumni who have built their careers in family law, starting with their studies at UMKC School of Law.

There are two characteristics of our Law Roo community's service to families that stand out: creativity and compassion. For example, while there are youth courts across the country, the Kansas City Youth Court is unique in its association with a law school and its use of trauma-informed responses to juvenile offenses. Likewise, the UMKC Child and Family Services Clinic is unique among law school family law clinics in focusing on permanency for children in the family court system. The Jackson County Family Court's unique and creative approach to appointment of attorneys to represent juveniles and parents would not work in a community that was unwilling to generously support the expert network of pro bono attorneys that grew to meet this demand. UMKC Law School is one of only three law schools in the country with an in-house journal devoted to family law. The students who have served on the *Journal of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers* research cutting-edge issues in family law practice that help not only attorneys but also their clients.

I have a great deal of confidence that this same creativity and compassion will lead our legal community to address the issues raised by our current public health and racial justice crises. I hope you and your family are well.

Peace,



Barbara Glesner Fines  
Dean and Rubey M. Hulen Professor of Law

**RES IPSA** (Latin for "It Speaks for Itself") is published by the UMKC School of Law, with financial support from the Law Foundation, for the benefit of alumni, friends and colleagues.

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COVER AND MAIN STORY IMAGES: The photography for this issue had to be reimagined with the onset of COVID-19. To create the courtroom images featured in the main stories and cover of this issue, each subject was photographed individually and then digitally placed within the scene. Our designer and photographer provided references for where each subject would be placed when the final image was compiled. In the photo to the left, designer Sarah Rogers sits in as the judge as Ayyoub Ajmi, associate director of the Leon E. Bloch Law Library, director of Digital Communications and Learning Initiatives at UMKC School of Law and 2L, and his daughter model family court participants. Photography by Brandon Parigo and photo illustration by Sarah Rogers.

# A Perfect Marriage

*Partnership with American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers journal launched UMKC's legacy of excellence in family law*

BY KELLY EDWARDS

A prominent Kansas City family law practitioner, Mike Albano was serving as president of the prestigious American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers (AAML). It was 1990 and one of his major tasks was to find a new home for the organization's national journal.

For Albano, a 1968 graduate of the UMKC School of Law and a staunch supporter of the university, there was really only one option for the new home of the Journal of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers.

"Because Mike was a graduate of the UMKC law school, his first choice was UMKC," says Professor Mary Kay Kisthardt, who has served as executive editor of the Journal since its arrival at UMKC 30 years ago. "Mike had to go through hoops to get the journal moved to UMKC."

Albano first approached then Dean Robert Popper, who embraced the idea, and went on to win approval from the University of Missouri System Board of Curators and the UMKC Faculty Senate.

As the editor, Kisthardt selects cutting-edge topics in family law representation and solicits the best scholarship on that topic for each issue. The Journal provides expertise to family law attorneys and judges across the United States, with articles ranging from divorce, custody, property and support issues to adoption, domestic violence, reproductive technology, ethics and more.

## PROMINENCE FOR UMKC

Only three major family law journals are published at law schools in the U.S. Being home to a journal adds many levels of prestige and recognition to the school and particularly to its family law program.

"Hosting a national journal at your law school is always a good thing," Kisthardt says. "Having your university affiliated with a national publication provides an opportunity for national name recognition."

Kisthardt says the Journal provides an enormous opportunity for student editors who work on the publication to gain valuable experience in research and writing. It also provides a unique opportunity to be published in a national journal before they graduate.

Erin Bajackson (J.D. '13) was part of the Journal staff while studying at UMKC. She was just the second student to have an article published in the Journal. She is now a partner at Albano, Richart, Welch & Bajackson LLC, practicing family law along with UMKC alumni Andrea Welch (J.D. '98), who practices criminal law, and Alyssa Kempf (J.D. '17).

"The fact that I could graduate from law school and have an article published in a national journal on my resume was huge," she says. "I don't know any place other than UMKC where I could have done that. I was very fortunate."



*AAML Board of Editors with Professor Mary Kay Kisthardt (far left) and UMKC Law student journal staff members.*



*Erin Bajackson (J.D. '13), partner at Albano, Richart, Welch & Bajackson LLC, was part of the AAML Journal staff while studying at UMKC. She was just the second student to have an article published in the Journal.*







Michael J. Albano (J.D. '68)

## MICHAEL ALBANO REMEMBERED FOR QUALITY PRACTICE OF LAW AND HUMANITARIANISM

BY KELLY EDWARDS

Michael J. Albano (J.D. '68), a longtime Kansas City family lawyer, passed away on Jan. 22, 2020.

Albano was a partner at Albano, Richart, Welch & Bajackson LLC, where he practiced for 51 years.

A noted family law author, lecturer and litigator, he was highly regarded by colleagues and peers for his knowledge and efforts to improve the practice of law.

"Mike absolutely changed my life," says Erin Bajackson (J.D. '13), who Albano hired to join the firm immediately after she graduated from law school. "I think you'd get that same comment from people throughout the law community. He was so gifted in family law."

Among his many awards and recognitions, Albano served as chair of the American Bar

Association Family Law Section and president of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers.

He also held numerous leadership positions with the Missouri Bar Association and at UMKC.

Admitted into the American College of Family Trial Lawyers, Albano was recognized in every issue of the *Best Lawyers in America* since the publication's inception in 1983. He was co-author of the first Missouri Dissolution of Marriage Act in 1974. He was a recipient of the Missouri Bar President's Award.

Albano was a loyal Roo and especially enjoyed UMKC basketball.

He served on numerous UMKC committees and was chairman of the UM System Alliance of Alumni as trustee for the Law Foundation. His service to his alma mater and to the legal profession was recognized with the UMKC Bill French Award and the Law School Alumni Achievement Award.

Noted for his service to many charitable organizations, Albano was recognized for having an unwavering sense of ethics and a heart to protect the families and children impacted by family law. He often remembered his less fortunate clients, getting them Christmas presents when they had little or none.

"He was so giving to the charities that he was passionate about and a mentor to so many," Bajackson says. "There were very few family law attorneys whose careers were not impacted by Mike in some way."

UMKC's partnership with the AAML goes beyond publishing its journal, Kisthardt says. A 14-member board of editors made up of academy members from across the country meets each August in Kansas City.

"One of the reasons the AAML attorneys come to the law school is to meet with the students," Kisthardt says. "This is a tremendous networking opportunity for our students."

Many UMKC law graduates have secured jobs because of the connections with the journal's board of editors and academy members during those annual meetings.

*"There is a general consensus that if your intent is to practice family law, UMKC is the best school to attend."*

### LAUNCHING PAD

Nearly 200 UMKC Law students have served on the Journal staff in its 30 years at the School of Law. As alumni, most are serving children and families throughout the nation today as attorneys and judges. In recognition of Kisthardt's 30 years of editing the Journal, the AAML recently provided a generous grant to UMKC School of Law to support their ongoing partnership.


In Kansas City, a number of leading family law firms are made up of UMKC grads who are AAML fellows.

All six practicing attorneys at Berkowitz Cook Gondring Driskell & Drobeck LLC earned their law degrees from UMKC. Two were members of the Journal staff. At Leonard Rodarte Siegel LLC, all four attorneys practice family law almost exclusively. Each is a UMKC graduate.

Family law attorneys Abraham Kuhl (J.D. '08) and Jared Frick (J.D. '15) of Young, Jakobe & Kuhl LLC also got their start at UMKC Law. Kuhl is the most recent addition to the AAML Journal's board of editors and will help mentor students on its staff. Ashley Irwin (J.D. '12), a member of the firm, says the school's reputation among local attorneys was one of the reasons she chose UMKC Law.

"There is a general consensus that if your intent is to practice family law, UMKC is the best school to attend," she says. ■





Family law attorney Ashley Aramjoo (J.D. '14) and Darrell Smith (J.D. '18) got their start in the law school's Child and Family Services Clinic. Professor Mary Kay O'Malley (right) is the clinic director.

# Practicing Family First

*With the 20th anniversary of the Child and Family Services Clinic, we celebrate its role in growing talented family law attorneys*

BY PATRICIA O'DELL

**T**hroughout Kansas City, Law Roos lead the pack in family law.

- In Jackson County Family Court, they are the commissioners on the bench and the juvenile officers and guardians ad litem in the courtroom.
- In the community, they are the attorneys who protect victims of abuse and neglect at nonprofit legal services offices such as Legal Aid of Western Missouri and CASA.
- They are the pro bono attorneys appointed to represent juveniles charged with offenses and parents charged with abuse or neglect.

- Recognized by the legal community as leaders in the field, they are attorneys who set the bar in matters involving divorce, custody, adoption, assisted reproduction and elder law.

This dominance in the field reflects the preparation for leadership UMKC students receive during their legal education. At the center of that education is the Child and Family Services Clinic, which provides free legal services for parents, relatives and custodians who need help obtaining clear and reliable custody orders for children who have a history of being abused or neglected.

Since its founding, the clinic has obtained legal permanency for 1,067 children. In addition, the companion Guardian ad Litem Clinic, founded in 2009, has represented over 70 children in order of protection cases.

## REAL-WORLD PRACTICE

Dean Barbara Glesner Fines and Professor Mary Kay Kisthardt founded the clinic in 2000 and asked Sandy Wirtel (J.D. '92) to become the clinic's first director. Wirtel's firm, Spencer Fane, allowed her to take a year sabbatical.

The School of Law did not house a family law clinic at the time Wirtel was a student.

*“The reality of the impact that students could have — the responsibility — is so important.”*



“The benefit of the clinical program was that it would instill in students the reality of family law,” Wirtel says. “In a conference room, on the phone or in court, the whole process is different when you’re aware that you are dealing with people. The reality of the impact that students could have — the responsibility — is so important. People’s lives are in your hands, and someone’s life can change based on your actions or inaction. It is an incredible responsibility that law students need to appreciate at the earliest point in their careers.”

When Wirtel returned to private practice, O’Malley took over the director’s position.

O’Malley brought invaluable experience working in child protection at the Missouri Division of Family Services and as a prosecuting attorney in family court.

Feeling fortunate to have found a career that lets her help improve children’s lives, O’Malley believes that, in some ways, the primary function of a social worker working with families in crisis is similar to how lawyers work to solve their clients’ problems. O’Malley hopes she has helped students recognize problem-solving as one of a lawyer’s essential functions, requiring a combination of knowledge, creativity and empathy for the client.

## THE CLINIC’S GROWING MISSION

For the first several years, the clinic was funded by a direct appropriation to UMKC from the state of Missouri to assist the Division of Legal Services in their representation of the Children’s Division. Clinic work focused on simple motions for release of jurisdiction and minor guardianship cases. State budget cuts in 2005 eliminated that funding and the clinic shifted to direct client representation with a goal of moving children safely out of the juvenile court system.

“This fundamentally changed the nature of the clinic for the better,” O’Malley says. “Our students are now working with an individual rather than an agency, and they are learning all aspects of child custody litigation in minor guardianships, adoptions, paternity actions and other domestic relations cases.”

The students’ work has real-world consequences for the clients, children and court system, which wants to release children from the protective oversight of the juvenile system with protective custodial orders.

O’Malley has witnessed older clients thank their student attorney with tears in their eyes following a hearing.

“Students tell me this experience amplifies the notion that they are part of a service profession,” O’Malley says, and the services the clinic offers have filled a void for low-income families needing help.

## PREPARED, COURTEOUS AND CIVIL STUDENTS



*Tricia Scaglia (J.D. '97)*

Tricia Scaglia (J.D. '97) started working with the family law program in 2014 when O’Malley asked her to co-teach the guardian ad litem clinical course.

“I thought it was an honor to be asked,” Scaglia says. “But beyond that, working with students makes you a better lawyer. Their perspectives help me look at things in a new way. They are so quizzical and bright — they really want more conversation. I am always learning something new from them.”

Scaglia notes that she can always spot a UMKC law clinic student.

“They just have a real love of the law — a dedication. They are absolutely prepared, courteous and civil. Those qualities are emphasized every day in UMKC’s clinical program,” Scaglia says.

She believes one of the strengths of the program is learning the ability to think on your feet.

“The advantage of experience in the clinic is that it’s practice based. You learn to think like a lawyer. Those basic tools apply in any situation,” Scaglia says.



*Ashley Armajoo (J.D. '14)*

Ashley Armajoo (J.D. '14) had thought she wanted to be a lawyer when she was growing up. She worked with underserved kids during the summers when she was in high school and she could see working with children as part of her career. But when she started law school she focused on employment and business law. An internship made her realize she’d taken a wrong turn.

“Family law was complex and emotional for the client,” Armajoo says. “I was nervous about that as a student. Professor O’Malley really allowed us to take charge. I was meeting one-on-one with clients and learning how to address complex questions. It was up to me to figure out the best approach. It’s a remarkable way to learn.”





*UMKC School of Law students in the Child and Family Services Clinic work to find permanent placements for children outside of the court system, such as adoption or relatives. Professor Mary Kay O'Malley leads the clinic.*





*“Our family law alumni not only practice here, but they are so generous with their time and expertise to the benefit of our students.”*



Artwork by children of Mattie Rhodes Art Camp adorns the clinic's walls.

Armajoo served as assistant director of the program for two years.

“Mary Kay knew that my husband, Paemon, and I wanted to start our own firm. She thought the job would be good experience for that. It was a two-year commitment. I stayed three and a half years. That’s how much I enjoyed it,” Armajoo says.

She and her husband, like most family law attorneys, work to maintain balance with their personal wish to make situations better.

“In school I made a point to meet with people who practiced family law. One of the things they told me was, ‘You can work to take the monkey off someone’s back. Just don’t put it on yours,’” Armajoo says.

She notes this can be difficult in practice.

“My husband and I can’t say, ‘Don’t bring it home.’ We practice and live together. But we do our best. We are always bouncing ideas off of each other.”



Darrell Smith, (J.D. '18)

Darrell Smith (J.D. '18) also found that working in the clinic was personally demanding.

“I worked (in the clinic) two semesters to be more involved with cases,” he says. “I wanted all the experience I could get. I found there has to be a balance. When it doesn’t go well I can take it hard.”

His experience at the law clinic helped prepare him for the demands of his job clerking for Presiding Judge David Byrn (J.D. '81) of the Jackson County 16th Circuit Court.

“It’s great work,” he says. “It’s been challenging with the (2019) flood (of the courthouse) and COVID,” Smith says. “It’s a roller coaster ride of new requirements, new responsibilities.”

UMKC alumni are committed to the work and to the clinic that gave them their start.

“Our family law alumni not only practice here, but they are so generous with their time and expertise to the benefit of our students,” O’Malley says. “They seek legal interns from our program, the local judiciary provides externships to our students, and our graduates can rely on alumni, not only for jobs, but by making recommendations and being mentors throughout their careers. It’s an incredibly supportive community.” ■



Sandy Wirtel (J.D. '92)

## ALUMNA FINDS HER CALLING IN JUVENILE COURT

*The law school's first Child and Family Services Clinic leader improves the lives of children — and the family court system — with her pro bono work*

BY SUZANNE KING

Sandra J. "Sandy" Wirtel had just entered law school at UMKC in 1990 when she was diagnosed with a rare form of breast cancer. Suddenly, at 23, practicing real estate law — the path she had mapped out for herself before enrolling — seemed a lot less important.

Wirtel stayed in school. Despite spending the first year and a half juggling homework with chemo, she graduated with her class in 1992 and was admitted to the bar the same year. Yet while classmates were pursuing clerkships and internships they hoped would place them on straight career trajectories, Wirtel was still hoping to discover what her legal passion would be.

"People were so competitive about grades and so into loving the law," she says. "But I wasn't."

That began to change during her last year in law school, when she enrolled in Family Law and the UMKC Legal Aid Clinic. After a year in the clinic defending young people who were facing charges in Jackson County's Juvenile Court, Wirtel found her true calling.

"There was finally some meaning to what I had been working hard to do," Wirtel recalls. "I could be a lawyer who helped kids."

For almost three decades that's what she's been doing.

Wirtel, who practices at Spencer Fane, is one of Kansas City's most experienced family law attorneys, representing parents and children in the family court system. She was the first professor to lead the Law School's Child and Family Services Clinic in 2000, and is a constant force to improve the process for children caught in the court system.

"She's a warrior in the courtroom and she's also very good at just getting down to brass tacks," says Lori L. Stipp (J.D. '86), a family court juvenile officer and a longtime colleague and friend of Wirtel's. "She's excellent at just being very forthright and stepping forward to speak her mind when something is not working right."

Spencer Fane hired Wirtel to handle the pro bono cases that its partners and associates were obligated to accept under Jackson County's unique juvenile appointment system.

In addition to her years of experience practicing family law, colleagues say, Wirtel has a natural gift for helping her clients get through very difficult circumstances.

"She's blunt, but not disrespectful," says Megan Roth (J.D. '03), who handles pro bono cases for Shook, Hardy & Bacon in Kansas City and was a student in the family law clinic when Wirtel was teaching there. "When dealing with clients, she's always professional and always empathetic."

Being empathetic is one of Wirtel's best gifts, Roth says, and one of the important things Wirtel taught her.

"We all have so many clients and it's hard to have much face-to-face time," Roth says. "When you do have that time, you've got to — in a very short period of time — get your client to listen to you and believe what you're saying and advising them to do."

Today, as Wirtel works from home, worried about the clients she can no longer see face-to-face because of the COVID-19 pandemic, she has had to put things into perspective all over again.

Recently, she learned that cancer has returned. Metastatic breast cancer is now in her bones. Wirtel isn't wavering about what she wants to do, though. Her calling hasn't changed, she says, and she hopes to spend the years she has left helping the kids who wind up in the family court system.

"I feel strongly that good quality parent representation helps kids," Wirtel says. "I want to feel like what I did mattered because a family was impacted, hopefully in a positive way."



Sandy Wirtel on Adoption Day, holding one of her youngest clients









# Alumni Step Up for Unique Family Court System

*Pro bono process in Jackson County, Mo., is unlike any other, and UMKC family law attorneys make it work*

BY SUZANNE KING

Sometimes when Megan Roth tries to explain to people who aren't from Kansas City how things work in Jackson County's family court system, they don't understand.

"People just look at me crosswise," says Roth (J.D. '03), who practices with Shook Hardy & Bacon, handling some of the firm's pro bono appointment work. "They can't believe this is what our county does."



*Megan Roth (J.D. '03)*

"This" is the 16th Judicial Circuit Family Court Division's unusual system of requiring any attorney who lives or works in Jackson County to accept appointments to represent indigent parents or children. The court maintains an alphabetical list of the county's approximately 5,000 attorneys, and without favor, doles out cases as they come along.

Each year, most lawyers — whether they are an in-house corporate counsel, a tax attorney or a law professor — receive at least one appointment, most often to represent a parent facing abuse or neglect charges.

*Megan Roth (J.D. '03) handles pro bono family court appointment work for Shook, Hardy & Bacon.*



The system, which may be unique in the entire country, is not without critics, who question how the court can require such unfunded pro bono service from lawyers who may not even have relevant expertise to handle the cases. But many agree the system has succeeded in providing clients with strong representation for some 30 years, largely because it has spawned a network of experienced lawyers like Roth — many of whom attended the UMKC School of Law and benefited from the school's strong family law program — who are passionate about the need for kids to get a fair shake in the legal system.

## THE NEED WAS CLEAR

While the Sixth Amendment of the United States Constitution provides a right to counsel in criminal cases, this right is much less certain in civil cases. Within family law, however, most states have adopted statutes requiring it. In Missouri, state law gives the right to appointed counsel in juvenile proceedings and in actions for the termination of parental rights.

About 30 years ago, the 16th Circuit Court of Jackson County began handling this obligation by contracting with the Legal Aid and Public Defender offices. But as the caseload increased and the Legal Aid and Public Defender organizations restructured, the county began increasing its reliance on private attorneys. By 1996 the court had instituted its current system, requiring every attorney in the county to take on these cases.

The court has always allowed appointed attorneys to find substitute counsel, so during the mid-1980s, as more and more private attorneys were being appointed to represent clients in family court, many of Kansas City's largest firms began hiring staff attorneys with experience in family law who could handle all of the firms' appointments. The firms saw this approach as both more cost effective and more ethical, since the appointed attorney may not have had any relevant experience.

*“I think we’re having better chances for families to succeed in the programs that are designed to aid reunification.”*

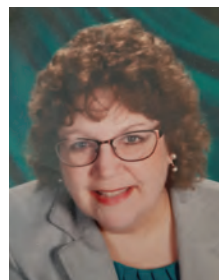
Eventually, these “pro bono” attorneys at big firms began taking on appointments for their firms' corporate clients, as well, when those clients' in-house attorneys were called to serve. The result is a system of highly experienced “pro bono” attorneys handling the majority of Jackson County's family court matters.

Today, as the system has evolved, every large law firm has at least one staff attorney to handle this work. And smaller firms often contract with lawyers who specialize in family court work.

An important trailblazer for this role was Judge Kelly Moorhouse (J.D. '85) who served as the pro bono attorney for the firm of Watson Ess and later went on to become a much respected Family Court commissioner and then 16th Judicial Circuit Court judge. After Moorhouse's untimely passing, the Kansas City Metropolitan Bar Association established the Kelly J. Moorhouse Dedication to Children Award. UMKC Law alumni or faculty have been five of the seven recipients of this award: Tricia M. Scaglia (J.D. '97), Jill M. Katz (J.D. '89), Jennifer Oswald Brown (J.D. '01), Ellen Jervis (J.D. '90) and Professor Mary Kay O'Malley.

## FAMILIES BENEFIT FROM EXPERTISE

Many of the lawyers involved in Jackson County's pro bono appointment system maintain it allows for a much more competent pool of lawyers serving family court clients than might be available under a different appointment system.



Lori L. Stipp (J.D. '86)

“If you look at other places like St. Louis or other big cities, they just don't have the same system,” says Lori L. Stipp (J.D. '86), who is a juvenile officer in the Family Court Division, meaning she is one of the lawyers who files cases against parents or children. “I don't feel some of them get the same quality of representation.”

Most jurisdictions have a budget and set up contracts with public defender offices to handle the indigent client cases, or contract directly with private attorneys. But this may mean that overloaded, poorly paid attorneys, or private attorneys who lack experience in the highly specialized family court system, must take on cases.

“I think it works for the families because they’re not getting a tax attorney (to represent them) who not only doesn’t know what they’re doing, but doesn’t want to be there,” says Laurie V. Snell (J.D. ’93), a lawyer who has built her practice handling these appointments for other firms.

## ATTORNEY SUPPORT

Cases that end up in family court, which often involve parents losing their parental rights or children caught in highly traumatic and tragic situations, are unlike any cases a lawyer might see in other civil courts. Knowing who the judges are, where to find social services for clients and having the experience in the system to come up with solutions or settlements on the fly is vital to good representation, lawyers say.

“Civil trials are heavily rooted in motions,” Roth says. “But family court is rooted in motions and oral arguments that are made off the cuff because it’s hard to plan in advance because everything changes so quickly.”

As it has evolved, Jackson County’s juvenile appointment system has led to a strong network of highly qualified attorneys to handle these cases.

Over the years, an ad hoc group of attorneys who regularly represent parents and kids in family court cases have formed an alliance to share information and support each other. The group regularly gets together to help each other stay informed so they can provide the best representation to their clients.

Even as the group has changed over the years, it’s always based on the same premise: helping each other and being available to help lawyers who lack family court experience. Many of these lawyers also serve or have served on a court-appointed Juvenile Court Advisory Panel, which also works with professional staff at the court to advise appointed attorneys.



Sandy Wirtel (J.D. ’92)

Sandy Wirtel (J.D. ’92), a pro bono attorney with Spencer Fane, who has spent her career handling cases in family court, says the group of fellow family court pro bono attorneys has always been crucial to her practice. And she says it has been a proactive force toward positive change at the court.

*“It works for the families because they’re not getting a tax attorney (to represent them) who not only doesn’t know what they’re doing, but doesn’t want to be there.”*

“There are better informed social workers, better informed lawyers and a better informed judiciary,” Wirtel says. “I think we’re having better chances for families to succeed in the programs that are designed to aid reunification.”

While many agree the Jackson County system is working for families and children, questions remain about whether the system will continue. Will big firms continue to support pro bono appointments in such a substantial way? And will private attorneys continue to comply with the compelled service the court puts on them?



Laura Higgins Tyler  
(J.D. ’81)

Over the years there have been challenges, none successful. But Laura Higgins Tyler (J.D. ’81), staff attorney with Stinson LLP, is hopeful the system will stay in place. She knows it wouldn’t work without broad financial support from Kansas City law firms — especially the biggest ones. But those firms were on board when the system got started back in the ’80s, and she believes that support will continue.

“The court went to the bar at large and said, ‘Can you put your name on the wheel and will you accept these appointments?’” says Tyler, who has been serving as a family court pro bono attorney since 1989. “It gives me chills to hear that individual attorneys were willing to do this. ... I think it continues in that regard to be, not only unique, but just a real testament to the acceptance of responsibility every attorney has.” ■



# UMKC Law a Good Parent for KC Youth Court

*Teens — offenders and ‘attorneys’ — thrive in  
youth court hosted at UMKC School of Law*

BY GREG HACK





*Judge Kea Bird-Riley (J.D. '07) was an assistant director of Kansas City Youth Court as a 3L. She currently serves as a family court commissioner for Jackson County. Lori L. Stipp (J.D. '86) is a juvenile officer in family court.*





The idea behind youth court seems simple enough: Juveniles charged with relatively minor, first-time offenses are prosecuted, defended and judged by teenage peers who have been trained for the mission.

Making the idea a reality, however, takes organization, mentorship and extensive legal knowledge. For Kansas City Youth Court, UMKC School of Law has provided those resources and more in a unique relationship spanning 30 years.



Hon. Kea Bird-Riley  
(J.D. '07)

Along the way, the youth court has helped hundreds of young people from disadvantaged areas in Kansas City — both those who volunteer as attorneys and judges and those who appear as defendants, says Judge Kea Bird-Riley (J.D. '07), who acted as an assistant director of the youth court as a 3L and then went on to a career in family law. She currently

serves as a family court commissioner in Jackson County, responsible for cases involving juvenile justice as well as families experiencing abuse and neglect. She also is responsible for overseeing the Family Drug Court docket.

“Youth court helps teaches youth attorneys and judges to be active listeners, independent and critical thinkers and great public speakers,” Bird-Riley says. “It also gives youth referred to youth court a perspective from their peers of how to avoid future legal problems while being held accountable for their actions.”

Youth court is “an excellent way to introduce high school students to UMKC’s law school,” notes Bird-Riley. Over the years, many volunteers have later become mentors as undergraduates and then as UMKC law students.



Mallory McDonald  
(J.D. '16)

That was the case for Mallory McDonald (J.D. '16), who served as an attorney after two of her classmates at St. Teresa’s Academy in Kansas City, Missouri told her about youth court.

“Youth court allowed me to gain a better understanding of the legal system and sparked my interest in becoming an attorney,” says

McDonald, whose practice with Rooney McBride & Smith in Springfield, Missouri, includes family law cases. “After high school, I assisted in youth court training for a few summers.

Once I began attending law school at UMKC School of Law, I began assisting with hearings and participating in the (youth court) board meetings.”

McDonald also saw youth court benefit the defendants she worked with. “I firmly believe juvenile diversion programs lessen the likelihood of recidivism,” she says. “The judges and attorneys have a unique opportunity to positively impact an alleged offender’s view of the criminal justice system.”



Daniel Berezoski (J.D. '10)

Perhaps most importantly for the young offenders, they get to know peers and adults who want them to succeed, notes Daniel Berezoski (J.D. '10), a family law pro bono attorney for Husch Blackwell and a member of the youth court board.

“So many of them need programs tailored toward mentorship, respect and accountability. Positive relationships are so important at this age, and that is exactly what the youth court provides,” Berezoski says.

*“Youth court allowed me to gain a better understanding of the legal system and sparked my interest in becoming an attorney.”*

## TRAILBLAZER'S IDEA



Hon. Mildred Watson  
(J.D. '74)

Judge Mildred Watson (J.D. '74) came to be known as “the mother of Kansas City’s youth court.” She had already been a mathematician for the U.S. military and an associate professor of social work when, at age 50, she enrolled at UMKC School of Law. Soon after she earned her law degree, Watson was appointed commissioner of the Juvenile Division of the Jackson County Circuit Court, the first African-American woman to serve as a judicial officer for the circuit.



*Kayla Kratofil (J.D. '17) working with youth court attorneys before a hearing.*

With her background in social work, she hoped to start a youth court for Kansas City. She set up a task force to create the court, which included Ellen Suni, professor and later dean of UMKC School of Law, and Christine Sill-Rogers, who earned her bachelor's degree in administration of justice at UMKC. Sill-Rogers, who later became a judge on the circuit, was a pro bono attorney at the time.



*Hon. Christine Sill-Rogers*

"The early days of the youth court were frantic and fun," Judge Sill-Rogers says. "Dean Suni was the leader in helping to develop our curriculum, training materials and bar examinations. We recruited volunteer judges, defense attorneys and prosecutors to teach the students each role they would eventually fulfill. We started the program at Northeast

Law and Military Magnet High School and graduated our first class of youth attorneys in 1990, 30 years ago."

Two years later, the court was moved from Northeast to the UMKC School of Law, where it has been located ever since. Though many of the 1,000-plus youth courts across the country have some law school involvement, Kansas City's is the only one that is sponsored by and housed in a law school.



*Professor Mary Kay O'Malley*

## HOW IT WORKS

Students, ages 13 to 18, are recruited to be prosecutors, defense attorneys and judges. They receive 14 hours of initial training from the program director, Professor Mary Kay O'Malley and others. The volunteers must pass a youth court bar exam and be sworn in by a judge. The program

is funded by the Jackson County Community Backed Anti-Drug Tax (COMBAT).

The defendants are juveniles, ages 7 to 17, who have been referred for offenses such as trespassing, misdemeanor assault, traffic offenses, shoplifting, vandalism or other property damage, and possession of alcohol or marijuana. The defendants must not have a prior record of offenses.

Most youth courts have an adult judge, sometimes with an advisory jury of teenagers. Kansas City's judges instead are youth volunteers. Berezoski says the volunteers take that added responsibility very seriously, and they consistently come up with appropriate and creative sentencing. "This is profound, as they can see that the legal system has real-life effects, sometimes long lasting, on people and society," he says.



Parents and victims also can attend, as an apology and community service are part of most sentences.

Sentencing emphasizes apology, responsibility and learning, rather than punishment.

“Youth court’s consequences tend to be more creative and use more trauma-informed approaches to offenses,” O’Malley says. “That and being able to avoid a juvenile record are huge benefits to the defendants.”

“For victims who appear in youth court,” Sill-Rogers says, “it is eye opening to see an army of youth who care about community justice and who choose to spend their time working to hold youth accountable for breaking the law. Victims are often touched by the apologies they receive.”

Some victims have let offenders work at their stores and other businesses to make amends and do their community service.

## CAN I GET A WITNESS?

As they point out youth court’s strengths and contributions to the legal system, participants and graduates of the program also note how they themselves have benefited. And they see how this system can meet a fragile young person’s need to be seen and supported.

Alissia Canady remembers always being interested in the law, an interest deepened by her participation in the relatively new Kansas City Youth Court when she was in high school in the mid-1990s.

“It exposed me to the judicial system and how the courts work,” she says. “It also exposed me to advocacy and accountability in a civic environment.”

Coming from a disadvantaged family, Canady had to work her way through college and could not afford law school. But she earned a finance degree and, after several years in the workforce, made it to law school. Her career since has included time as a prosecutor, six years as a member of the Kansas City, Missouri, City Council and now private practice.

*“Youth court’s consequences tend to be more creative and use more trauma-informed approaches to offenses. That and being able to avoid a juvenile record are huge benefits to the defendants.”*

“I still have my youth court certificate somewhere,” she says. “That planted the seeds for me to go into public service, to advocate for people who otherwise might not have a voice, and to include family law in my practice, to engage parents and families on what they can do to raise healthy, whole, law-abiding kids.”

Kansas City Youth Court has been the first stop on a career serving families and children for many UMKC School of Law alumni.

Megan Roth (J.D. ’03), a pro bono attorney, was assistant director of the Kansas City Youth Court for five years and stayed on as a board member after that. As assistant director, she trained dozens of volunteers and saw human benefits beyond the legal knowledge they gained.

“Most importantly, they learn empathy,” she says. “They learn how to understand how bad choices are made, and how to really empathize with the decisions others are making.”

Judge Martina Peterson (J.D. ’94), a former youth court director, sums up the case for the program.



Hon. Martina Peterson  
(J.D. ’94)

“Youth court gives youth an idea of how legal processes work and exposes them to careers in the law. It allows them hands-on experience working with cases and defendants. It allows them the ability and experience to speak in public and develop arguments to support their position on their case. It allows them to be mentors and to provide a positive influence to other youth who are struggling. And because it is a diversion program, it provides a mechanism to appropriately address some poor decisions some youth make without destroying their future.” ■

*Editors note: During the COVID-19 pandemic, Kansas City Youth Court has suspended operations and is engaged in strategic planning for resuming operations when in-person hearings can resume.*



Irene Downs

## REMEMBERING A SHINING STAR

BY GREG HACK

Irene Downs began her dream of becoming a lawyer and a judge as a Kansas City Youth Court attorney. While her journey to the legal profession took 30 years, when she arrived at UMKC School of Law in January of 2017, she immediately became a leader, role model and powerful advocate for diversity and inclusion. The community lost Downs last fall due to complications of diabetes but her spirit continues to inspire the hundreds of friends, classmates, lawyers and judges who came to know her.

In tributes after she passed away, classmates remembered her as “the most selfless person I have ever met,” “the driving force of the student body,” “the most natural and impressive

leader,” and “an uncommonly kind and encouraging friend.” Emerita Dean Ellen Suni, who had known Downs since her youth court days, remembered Downs with these words: “As a Black, disabled woman, she had to continually bear the burden of proof of her capability. But Irene did overcome these challenges time and again. Along the way, Irene led others to appreciate their own strengths and to find the determination to pursue their own goals.”

Diagnosed with diabetes and suffering a hip injury in an accident, Downs had a challenging childhood. But she came into her own as a leader at Kansas City’s Northeast High School, at the time a magnet for students interested in law and public service. It also was the first home for Kansas City Youth Court, before it moved to UMKC after two years.

“Irene Downs was in our first graduating class in 1990,” said Judge Christine Sill-Rogers, one of the youth court’s founders and a longtime judge in Kansas City. “She was a superstar from the beginning. She had the gravitas of James Earl Jones in the body of a 16-year-old-girl.”

When an annual award was created to honor a youth court student, Sill-Rogers said, “hands down, Irene Downs was chosen as the first recipient.”

Participating in youth court spurred her desire to join the legal profession, but her family’s financial situation ruled out college. Her drive and intelligence served her well for decades in the workplace, though, even when

her eyesight deteriorated and her kidneys were impaired as a result of her diabetes.

She had success working for AT&T and other employers, and eventually she made it to UMKC for an undergraduate degree and starred on the school’s undergraduate Mock Trial team. Even though she had to take classes part time to accommodate extensive dialysis treatments, she took the law school by storm.

Patrick Swain (J.D. ’19) met Downs on their first day of law school, and they became fast friends. When he suffered a serious leg injury, she and her family took him in to their accessible home until he recovered. Somehow, he said, she found time to be everyone’s friend and biggest cheerleader — and to coach the undergraduate Mock Trial team, organize a softball team, revamp the Student Law Association’s constitution, help with the Pat Kelly Poker Tournament and the Barristers Ball, and serve on several boards and committees. She won lawyering skills competitions in advocacy and client competition, while supporting her teammates to achieve their best performances as well.

Starting her second year of law school, she hoped for a kidney transplant on her way to a legal career, but she passed away on Oct. 19, 2019.

When more than 300 people gathered for her memorial service at UMKC, her family received a Dean’s Certificate, much like a posthumous law degree.

Downs left a legacy of strength, courage and compassion. UMKC School of Law 3L student Jasmine Ward, president of the Black Law Students Association, says of her friend and mentor, “Irene never put on a hat or played a role — she was genuine and she was always herself. Her directness, her dedication, her love, her excitement to see a friend or tell a story, her protectiveness, her relationship with God and family — none of these things were pretend or over-polished. They were just Irene and they were phenomenal.

“Black women in the law often navigate spaces that ask us to play a role,” Ward says. “But Irene reminded me, often and in so many ways, to be my genuine self no matter the space. For that, she was and always will be one of my North Stars.”

Downs’ dreams were not only for herself. She often spoke of her vision of opening doors to the legal profession for others. She told her friends that she wanted to set up a scholarship fund that would “create a path for others like me to be propelled forward through the path of education.”

Her classmates and mentors at the school made sure that dream came true by establishing the Irene Downs Spirit of Mock Trial Scholarship.

# IRENE DOWNS DREAMED OF HELPING STUDENTS ATTEND LAW SCHOOL. LET'S MAKE THIS DREAM A REALITY.

Give to the the Irene Downs Spirit of Mock Trial Scholarship at  
[umkclaw.link/iredownsscholarship](http://umkclaw.link/iredownsscholarship)



# Family Law Dashboard

## EMPLOYMENT THROUGH THE CLASS OF 2019

96% of students enrolled in the Family Law Emphasis were employed in bar-required/J.D.-advantage jobs.\*



- 48% Law Firm
  - 30% Government
  - 10% Business/Industry
  - 7% Solo Law Firm
  - 5% Public Interest
  - 96% Employed through Class of 2019\*
- \*nine months after graduation

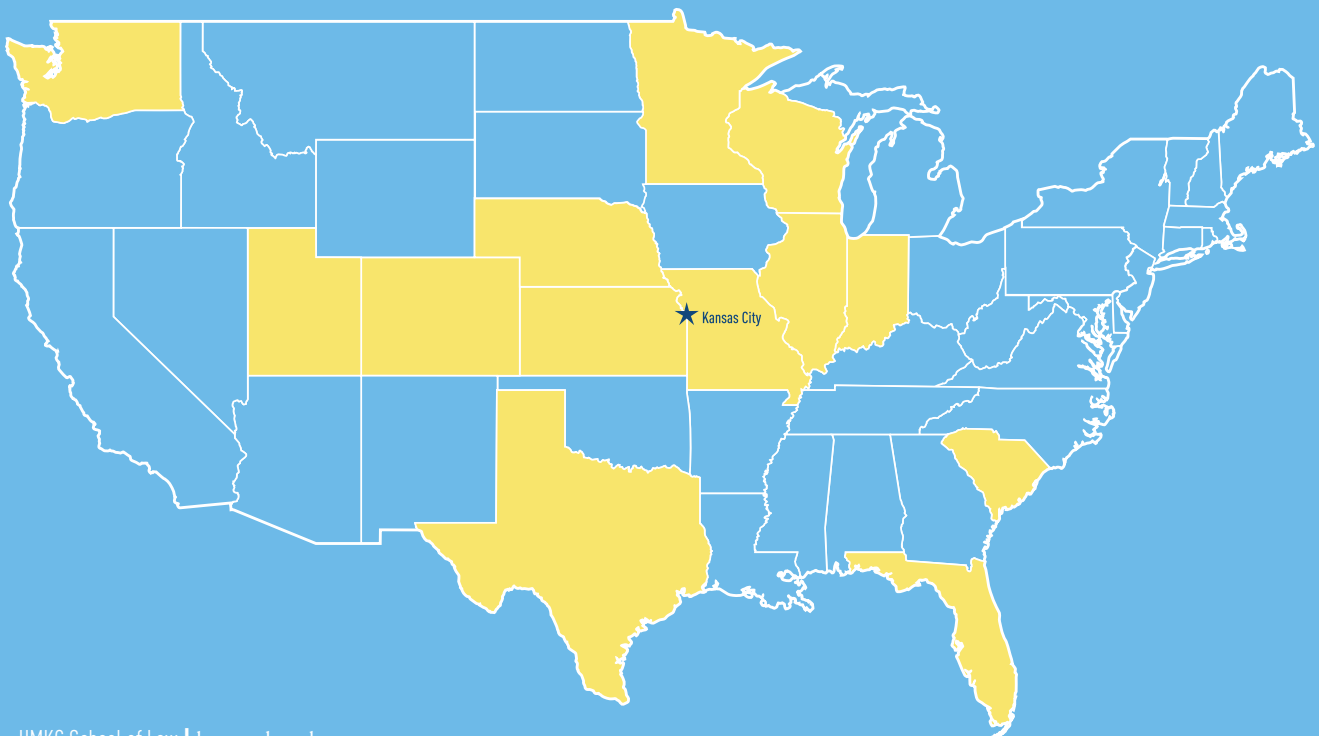
## RECOGNIZED FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Professors Mary Kay O'Malley and Mary Kay Kisthardt are two of only seven faculty members to be awarded the University of Missouri President's Award for Community Engagement.

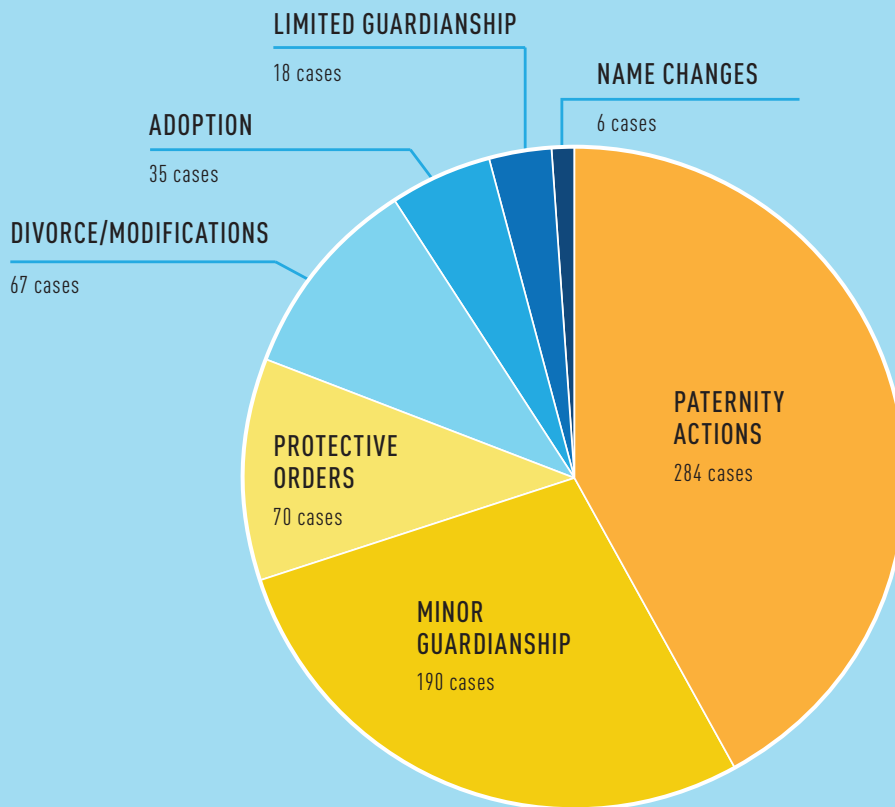
## GRADUATES OF THE FAMILY LAW PROGRAM

The Family Law program at UMKC School of Law prepares graduates to practice anywhere in the world. Alumni can be found all over the United States and as far away as China and Australia.



## IMPACT

In the Child and Family Services Clinic and the Guardian Ad Litem Clinic, permanency and protection have been provided for more than **1,137 children** by students completing the following types of cases:



## UMKC LAW FAMILY LAW ADJUNCT FACULTY AND FELLOWS

The School of Law has been fortunate to have family law attorneys willing to volunteer their time and expertise to prepare the next generation of family law attorneys. Current and emeritus adjuncts include:

Ashley Aramjoo (J.D. '14)  
 Danielle Atchison (J.D. '14)  
 Erica Driskell Hung (J.D. '06)  
 Preston Drobeck (J.D. '08)  
 Nathalie Elliott (J.D. '90)  
 Robert Gordon (J.D. '09)  
 Janelle Jennings-Drummond (J.D. '81, LL.M.'82)  
 Naomi Kauffman  
 Abraham Kuhl (J.D. '08)  
 Tiffany McFarland (J.D. '05)  
 Mira Mdviani (J.D. '99)  
 Anna Maria Merritt (J.D. '86)  
 Jennifer Oswald Brown (J.D. '01)  
 Dana Outlaw (J.D. '03)  
 Peter Raith  
 Craig Reaves  
 Patricia Scaglia (J.D. '97)  
 Kendall Seal (J.D. '08)  
 Betsy Ann Stewart (J.D. '67)  
 Hon. Mary Weir

In addition, the law school's fellowship program in the Child and Family Services Clinic has provided an outstanding opportunity for recent graduates to establish their practice while also helping to administer the Child and Family Services Clinic and supervise students. Family Law Fellows have included:

Brittany Goldschmidt (J.D. '11)  
 Ashley Aramjoo (J.D. '14)  
 Vanessa Vanden Bout Geer (J.D. '16)

Jessica Foxx (J.D. '17) serves as the current Family Law Fellow.

## STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

286

have participated in the Child and Family Law Services Clinic since 2001

69

completed the Family Law Emphasis from 2007-2019

37

course offerings in Family Law

## EXPERT COMMUNITY

4

full-time faculty in core emphasis

19

adjunct faculty specialists

30

government, educational and nonprofit community partners



# NEW FAMILY LAW PROFESSOR BRINGS A FOCUS ON REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE



In Fall 2020, UMKC Law will welcome Professor Yvonne (“Yvette”) Lindgren to the faculty. Professor Lindgren comes to us from the University of San Francisco School of Law and previously Indiana Tech Law School.

Lindgren earned her LL.M. and J.S.D. from Berkeley Law at the University of California, Berkeley, and her J.D. from UC Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco. She then served as a post-doctoral legal fellow at the Center on Reproductive Rights and Justice at Berkeley Law. She was co-executive editor of the 2015 first-edition casebook, *Cases on Reproductive Rights and Justice*, co-authored by Melissa Murray and Kristin Luker.

Lindgren talks with Dean Barbara Glesner Fines about her love of family law, respect for UMKC’s program and her academic interests.

## What got you interested in family law issues?

I have always been interested in issues related to gender — I was a women’s studies major in college — so family law was a natural choice for me because it includes issues that have been traditionally associated with women’s lives, including reproduction, child rearing, marriage and domestic violence.

What fascinates me about family law is thinking about the challenges and limitations of using law to order and regulate our intimate lives. On the one hand, the law protects family privacy, but that can be a problem in the context of domestic violence and child abuse. At the same time, the law works to channel intimacy into state-sanctioned, two-person nuclear monogamous procreative marital intimacy.

## Do you have a particular example of this dynamic?

Yes! One of my favorite articles in family law examined the post-slavery period in which emancipated slaves had multiple spouses because their marriages had been disrupted when their spouses and children were sold away from their families. After emancipation, formerly enslaved people were told that they could have only one spouse. The complex webs of their families that resulted from slavery — what came to be extended family networks that sustained people in challenging times after slavery — were forced to fit into two-person nuclear marital couplings.

## What courses will you be teaching?

In addition to teaching the core courses in Family Law and in Children and the Law, I am looking forward to adding a reproductive

rights and justice course to the law school’s robust family law offerings. The reproductive justice framework examines reproduction through the lens of race, class, immigration status and other statuses to consider how various systems work to deny individuals and communities the right to have children, to not have children and to raise children with dignity. The reproductive justice framework looks beyond a singular focus on abortion to consider reproduction across the arc of an individual’s reproductive life.

## What attracted you to UMKC and Kansas City?

I am thrilled to move to Kansas City and to join the UMKC faculty. As a family law scholar, I’ve long admired the law school’s extraordinary family law program. There is no other law school that offers the depth and breadth of the family law program at UMKC.

I will be moving to Kansas City with my three daughters and our dog, Wilson. I have lived in Indiana and in rural Iowa and I am eager to be back in the Midwest with its fireflies, warm evenings and summer rainstorms. One of the things I love most about Kansas City is that it is both sophisticated with museums, restaurants and music and is also low-key and accessible.

“AS A FAMILY LAW SCHOLAR, I’VE LONG ADMIRERED THE LAW SCHOOL’S EXTRAORDINARY FAMILY LAW PROGRAM.”

## 1980s

**Kirk Presley (J.D. '83)** was elected to the 16th Circuit Judicial Commission. He is the founder and principal of Presley & Presley LLC. Presley has served the UMKC Law Foundation as a trustee and vice president of development. He has received the Law Foundation's President's Award and the Pat Kelly Service Award.

## 1990s

**Derek Feagans (J.D. '98)** has opened a law firm, Feagans, LLC, providing a full range of business legal services, including general counsel, corporate, real estate and sports entertainment.

**Michael Textor (J.D. '96)** was named president of the Construction Lawyers Society of America (CLSA), an invitation-only international honorary association composed of preeminent lawyers specializing in construction law and related fields.

## 2000s



**Sarah Castle (J.D. '12)** was appointed associate circuit judge of Division 27. She fills a vacancy created by the retirement of Judge Gregory B. Gillis.



**Jennifer Cascio (J.D. '12)** joined Salvi, Schostok & Pritchard P.C. Her legal practice focuses on catastrophic personal injury, medical negligence, product liability and mass torts. Cascio was selected for the Rising Star 2020 award.



**Gizie D. Hirsh (J.D. '06)** has been promoted to partner at Lathrop GPM. Hirsh leads the firm's business immigration practice. Her practice focuses on representing businesses

and individuals before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, the U.S. Department of Labor, the Department of State and Customs and Border Protection.

**Nick Hoffman (J.D. '00)** was elected as a partner at Stinson Leonard Street LLP. He is a member of the firm's Corporate Finance Division.

**Noah Nash (J.D. '19)** joined the law firm of Lathrop GPM. Nash is part of the Insurance and Recovery and Counseling team. He will handle a variety insurance recovery matters, mass tort claims, environmental litigation, campaign finance and class action lawsuits. Prior to his legal career, Nash worked as a catastrophe claims adjuster for a large insurance carrier, where he provided aid to victims of natural disasters.



**Darrell Smith (J.D. '18)** was crowned king and **Michelle Marvel (J.D. '07)** was crowned queen at Operation Breakthrough's Mardi Gras luncheon for their work for Operation Breakthrough.

## IN MEMORIAM



John Francis Baty ('13)

**John Francis Baty (J.D. '13)** passed away Oct. 19, 2019. He practiced at the law firm of Baty Otto Coronado P.C. alongside his father, Lee Baty, and his sister Laura Kaufman.



Michael J. Albano ('68)

**Michael J. Albano (J.D. '68)** passed away Jan. 22, 2020. Albano was partner at Welch, Martin and Albano LLC, where he practiced law for 51 years. He was a noted family law author, lecturer and litigator. He served many charitable organizations and was universally respected and loved by his colleagues and peers for his knowledge, efforts to improve the practice, mentorship, unwavering ethics, and heart to protect families and children impacted by family law. His awards and recognitions were voluminous, including the Missouri Bar President's Award. Albano attended UMKC as an undergraduate and was an avid UMKC supporter. He was a fixture in the stands at Roo athletic events. He received the UMKC Bill French Award and Law School Alumni Achievement Award. He served on numerous UMKC committees. He served as chairman of the UM System Alliance of Alumni as trustee of the Law Foundation.



James H. Marsh Jr. ('65)

**James H. Marsh Jr. (J.D. '65)** passed away Nov. 26, 2019. Marsh graduated first in his law class and was the co-editor of the Law Review. He was a member of Order of the Bench and Robe. A few years after he graduated from law school, Marsh relocated to the Washington, D.C., area for nearly 30 years, where he was partnered in several patent firms and a longtime associate of the Licensing Executives Society. He previously worked for Staas & Halsey, Shook Hardy & Bacon LLP and Stinson LLP.



# FOUNDATION ALUMNI AWARD WINNERS



## **DECADE AWARD:** **Lindsay J. Runnels** (J.D. '09)

Lindsay J. Runnels practices at Morgan Pilate LLC. She has spent 10 years working in the defense of indigent prisoners seeking to overturn their sentences and death penalty cases. She worked as a full-time clinical professor at UMKC where she directed the Wrongful Convictions Clinic. She taught and supervised students in the investigation and litigation of innocence cases at both UMKC and MU. She has assisted with the cases of wrongfully convicted individuals including Rodney Lincoln, Lamonte McIntyre and Dale Helming. She received the Missouri Bar Association Young Lawyers Section Pro Bono Award in 2014. She is a board member for The Midwest Innocence Project.



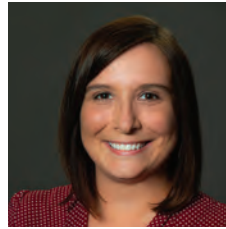
## **PAT KELLY SERVICE AWARD:** **Stephen J. Cosentino** (J.D. '97)

Steve Cosentino is a partner at the law firm of Stinson LLP. He served as president of the Law Foundation Board of Trustees from 2011 – 2013, and he is a former member of the

Law Alumni Association Board of Directors. He is a co-founder and committee chair of the Bob Downs Annual Scholarship Golf Tournament, which funds three significant scholarships at UMKC School of Law. He has been a supporter of the Pat Kelly Scholarship Poker Tournament and speaks often at UMKC CLE sessions. Cosentino is a great ambassador and advocate for UMKC School of Law, devoting efforts to recruiting high-caliber law students and increasing the profile of the law school within the community.

## **PHILANTHROPY AWARD:** **Jack and Helyn Miller Foundation**

Since 1996, the Jack and Helyn Miller Foundation has provided a significant scholarship each year for a 1L, 2L and 3L law student, totalling more than \$1 million. The scholarship honors the legacy of Jack Miller, who graduated from the Kansas City School of Law in 1932. When Miller graduated, he did not have enough money for travel expenses to take the bar exam. He established the scholarship to help law students avoid financial difficulties like those he encountered and develop future community leaders.



## **PRO BONO/PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD:** **Crissy Del Percio** (J.D. '13)

Crissy Del Percio is an attorney at Legal Aid of Western Missouri. As a law student, she worked in the Domestic Unit at Legal Aid of Western Missouri where she helped serve victims of domestic violence and handled divorce cases. After graduation, she was hired full time as an order of protection attorney at Legal Aid. She has served as the co-chair of Domestic Violence Alliance CLE for several years. As part of her service to the community, she plans and executes an annual session for lawyers and non-lawyers to learn about domestic violence. She is also co-chair of the Juvenile Law Committee. In addition, Crissy was the president of the UMKC Family Law Society from 2011 – 2013. Outside of her Legal Aid position, Del Percio visits women at local domestic violence shelters to help share information and answer legal questions. She instructs a pro se clinic to help people who can't afford an attorney but need assistance with the pro se forms so they can get a divorce. She received the Young Lawyer of the Year Award in 2019 from Kansas City Metropolitan Bar Association.



## **PRESIDENT'S AWARD:** **Debbie Brooks** (J.D. '01)

As a law student, Debbie Brooks co-founded the Midwest Innocence Project and was awarded the Harry S. Truman Leadership Award.

Since her retirement as assistant dean of admissions at UMKC School of Law, she has continued her significant volunteerism at UMKC and in the community. Brooks established the Alan E. Brooks Endowment Scholarship with the UMKC Law Foundation in the memory of her husband and is a member of the Foundation's board of trustees. She volunteers as a member of the board of trustees for the Chancellor's African American Leadership Council and on UMKC's Multicultural Affairs Committee. Brooks is the current president of the UMKC Women's Council, Kansas City Friends of Alvin Ailey and chair of the Kansas City Food Advisory Board. She is a member of the Missouri and Jackson County bar associations and Black Female Attorneys. She serves as a guide and mentor for those seeking higher education.



**LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD:  
Hon. Sandra C. Midkiff (J.D. '75)**

Sandra Midkiff serves as a judge for the 16th Judicial Circuit Court. She graduated with honors in 1975 in a class of more than 200, but less than 20 women. Midkiff started her

career in law when female lawyers were still few and far between, especially in litigation practice. Following graduation, she owned and operated a private law practice. In her 26 years of private practice, she litigated many different types of cases including employment discrimination, civil rights, sexual harassment and business and commercial torts.

In 2002, Midkiff was appointed Circuit Judge for Division 1 of the 16th Circuit Court of the Jackson County, Missouri. In 2008, she received the Benjamin Cardozo Award for Judicial Courage and Excellence from the Missouri Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers. She was a Board member of Jackson County Law Library for several years and served as the program chair. Currently, she is a member of the Missouri Commission on Judicial Retirement and Discipline. She is an original member of the Association for Women Lawyers for Greater Kansas City where she has taken many female attorneys under her wing and provided mentorship.



**THE JAY B. DILLINGHAM AWARD:  
David C. Stoup (J.D. '77)**

David Stoup is the chairman of Trilogy Spa Holdings, an exclusive spa management company. The company creates unique high-performance hospitality spa environments in four-

and five-star properties. He also is the chairman and CEO of Healthy Lifestyle Brands, a licensing company that specializes in health and wellness. During his 30-year career, Stoup has founded and reinvented a variety of companies, concentrating on firms with upscale consumer products and services. He is a director for the Amazon Conservation Team, founder of YPO's Global Youth Exchange and board member of St. Joseph's Medical Center. He also is an active member of World Presidents Organization (WPO) and Chief Executives Organization (CEO). During his third year in law school, Stoup was elected by students from all law schools in the country to serve as president of Law Student Division of the American Bar Association. Stoup, along with his family members, have honored Art Stoup – their father and 1950 alumnus of the law school – by establishing the Arthur H. Stoup Courtroom in the UMKC Law building. The Stoup Courtroom is modeled after a district courtroom and has the most advanced technology systems available for legal teaching and learning.

# THANK YOU, LAW ALUMNI

Your generous contributions of \$18,500 to the Students 1st Fund helped our students cope with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Special recognition to Davis Bethune Jones for the matching gift

UMKC School of Law Foundation  
**STUDENTS 1<sup>st</sup> FUND**

**THE LAW FOUNDATION**  
of the University of Missouri-Kansas City



## ALUMNI EVENTS

### DIVERSE STUDENT COALITION BANQUET

The inaugural Diverse Student Coalition Scholarship Banquet was held March 5, 2020, at the Havana Room. The sold-out event was hosted by the Diverse Student Coalition, made up of the Black Law Student Association (BLSA), Latino Law Student Association (LLSA), the Asian & Pacific Islander Law Student Association (APILSA), and the Outlaws (the law school's LGBTQ student organization). Kansas City Mayor Quinton Lucas was the keynote speaker. The banquet raised enough funds to establish a new Diverse Student Coalition Scholarship, with help from matching funds from the Westfall Matching Funds program of the UMKC Law Foundation. Special thanks to all of our sponsors for their support.



TOP RIGHT (left to right): Professor Mikah Thompson, Sommer Sharpe, 2L, Kait Turner, 2L, and Professor Jamila Jefferson-Jones

MIDDLE RIGHT: Ayyoub Ajmi, associate director, Leon Bloch Law Library and 2L, and Mekebib Solomon (J.D. '20)



BOTTOM: Front Row: (left to right) Dara Alvarado, 3L, Mayor Quinton Lucas, Dean Barbara Glesner Fines and Yasmin Herdoiza, 3L; second row: (left to right) Raj Patel (J.D. '20), Callie Williams, 3L, Grace Colato (J.D. '20), Jasmine Ward, 3L, Hannah Bassham (J.D. '20), Taylor Thompson (J.D. '20) and Nihit Desai (J.D. '20); back row: Thaddeus Green, 3L





## THE BIG EVENT

The Big Event “Casablanca As Time Goes By” was the kick-off event for the 125th Anniversary of UMKC School of Law. The themed event was a sold-out affair with 270 alumni, faculty students and friends. The evening included dinner, a band, photo booth and martini luge ice sculpture. The highlight was the awards presentation to six alumni and one organization.

TOP RIGHT (left to right): Chris and Sara Christensen (J.D. '14) dressed in the theme, “Casablanca: As Time Goes By”



MIDDLE RIGHT (left to right): Jennifer Robertson (J.D. '08), Law Alumni Association President Kip Robertson (J.D. '06) and Shirley and Kirk Goza



BOTTOM RIGHT: Stephen Cosentino (J.D. '97), Debbie Brooks (J.D. '01), Lindsey Runnels (J.D. '09), Hon. Sandra Midkiff (J.D. '75), David Stoup (J.D. '77) and Chrissy Del Percio (J.D. '13)



TOP LEFT: Keith (J.D. '14) and Dana Cutler (J.D. '14) pose in front of the themed ice sculpture

BOTTOM LEFT: Chad Stewart (J.D. '02) and Heather Hardinger (J.D. '10)





## ALUMNI EVENTS

### PAT KELLY POKER TOURNAMENT

The annual Pat Kelly Scholarship Poker Tournament was held Friday, Sept. 6, 2019, at the Student Union. The tournament is co-sponsored by the Student Bar Association (SBA). More than 80 alumni, faculty and students attended.



TOP RIGHT (left to right): Eric Honea, 2L, Ron Nguyen (J.D. '09), Dejaun Temple (J.D. '20) and Brian Russell

MIDDLE RIGHT: Final Table – Front Row: (left to right) Bob Gordon (J.D. '09), Emerita Dean Ellen Suni, Brennan Delaney (J.D. '08), Dean Barbara Glesner Fines; back row: (left to right) Joe Salazar (J.D. '20), Hannah Bassham (J.D. '20), McKenzi Higgins (J.D. '15), Eric Playter (J.D. '06) and David Arnold



BOTTOM RIGHT: Leonard Stephens (J.D. '09), Chris Kurtz ('09), Brennan Delaney (J.D. '08), Tournament Chair Blake Heath (J.D. '09) and Patrick Swain (J.D. '19)

BOTTOM LEFT: Tournament winner McKenzie Higgins (J.D. '15) was presented the trophy by Dean Barbara Glesner Fines





## SCHOLARSHIP RECEPTION

The annual Scholarship Reception was held Thursday, Jan. 24, 2020, at the law school. The reception gives donors the opportunity to meet their student recipients.

TOP RIGHT (left to right): Donor Debbie Brooks (J.D. '01) and her student recipient, Eric Honea, 2L



MIDDLE RIGHT: Jehan Kamil Moore, Hon. Jon Gray (J.D. '76), Morgan Parker, 2L, and Professor Jamila Jefferson-Jones



BOTTOM RIGHT: Chance Lasater, 2L, and donor Timothy Brake (J.D. '73)



BOTTOM LEFT: Lydia Stephens, 2L, with donor Anne Schiavone (J.D. '99)





# ALUMNI EVENTS

## TRIVIA NIGHT

February 2020 was the 10th anniversary of the Child and Family Services Clinic Trivia Night. Since the beginning, Trivia Night has been organized and hosted by UMKC Law students in the Family Law Society. Students sell tables, solicit auction items and create and manage the event from start to finish. The program raises funds for the clinic and provides an evening of fun and friendship for our entire family law community.

TOP RIGHT (left to right): Maggie Anderson (J.D. '08), Preston Drobeck (J.D. '08) and Erica Driskell Hung (J.D. '06)

MIDDLE RIGHT (left to right): Professor Mary Kay O'Malley, Preston Drobeck (J.D. '08), Erica Driskell Hung (J.D. '06), Jennifer Oswald Brown (J.D. '01), Robert Gordon (J.D. '09) and Abraham Kuhl (J.D. '08)

BOTTOM RIGHT: 2020 Family Law Trivia Night

BOTTOM LEFT (left to right): Vanessa Geer (J.D. '16) and Megan Roth (J.D. '03)



# Q & A

## Peter J. Donnici

By Kaylyn Hedges

**Law Roo Peter J. Donnici (J.D. '62) grew up in Kansas City and expected his law career to flourish here, too. But instead, a series of opportunities took him to the West Coast, and then around the world.**

### **What struck you most about your time at UMKC?**

What impressed me so much was the emphasis that UMKC put on training you for the practice of law. I thought it was an excellent education. I thought the professors were excellent. I graduated from the law school almost 57 years ago now, and I still have fond memories of my time there.

### **Where did you go after graduation?**

I spent the next academic year at Yale Law School, where I received a master of laws degree. I was pretty much set to return to Kansas City, but I got an offer to teach at the University of San Francisco.

After two years there, the dean urged me to stay on and continue teaching, which I did, and eventually I got to meet and work with the man who was the mayor of San Francisco at that time, Joseph Alioto. I represented him in a defamation suit against *Look* magazine because they had published an article indicating he was meeting with members of the mafia. I argued his case in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.

I am very proud that it's one of the few cases ever brought by a public official for defamation that we won.



As a result of the publicity I received from the case, I was approached by this young man named Larry Hillblom, who had just started a company called DHL Worldwide Express.

That began a long relationship with DHL, which involved a lot of international travel. Larry later relocated to the island of Saipan as his home base and wanted me to help him in some of the battles he was waging in the United Nations on behalf of the commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, of which Saipan is part, to establish their sovereignty.

### **How did you get involved in his foundation?**

When Larry died in a plane crash in 1995, he had, in his will, established a charitable trust to support medical research and named me as the chairman. I retired from practicing law and have spent the rest of my career as the president and chairman of the board of the Larry L. Hillblom Foundation. The Foundation has contributed about \$150 million to medical research, primarily in the fields of Alzheimer's, diseases of aging and diabetes.

### **The Hillblom Foundation also has been a big supporter of our Specia Family Law fund. Why is that?**

I would not have had the career I had were it not in particular for the encouragement I received from Professor John Specia. I had a job with a major law firm in Kansas City after graduation, but Professor Specia insisted that I should continue my education. He contacted Professor Quintin Johnstone at Yale Law School and the next thing I knew I was admitted as a Sterling Fellow. Professor Specia was a family law scholar and there is so much great work being done at UMKC in family law, I'm proud to have the Foundation help support those efforts.

### **What advice would you give to current students or graduates of the UMKC School of Law who are just starting out?**

Don't accept everything you read and hear. Don't even accept everything your professors tell you without analyzing on your own the pros and cons of any particular position, whether it's a legal issue, a social issue or a political issue. Whatever it is, use your critical-thinking skills. Mentor anyone who asks for mentorship or guidance. Follow your hopes and dreams and go where life leads you.



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Photo: Annie Leibovitz

Featuring keynote speaker **DORIS KEARNS GOODWIN**, a world-renowned presidential historian, public speaker and *New York Times* #1 best-selling author. Goodwin earned the Pulitzer Prize for *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II*. Steven Spielberg's film *Lincoln* was based on her best-selling and award-winning *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*.