

Women from Washburn are Making an Impact

In past decades, Washburn University School of Law has drawn talented women from around the world to follow in the footsteps of earlier alumnae. This section focuses on the success of eleven of Washburn Law's rising stars. These women are having early career successes that the pioneer alumnae could have only dreamed of decades ago. The rising stars are up-and-coming women who are or have been tribal attorneys, in high level attorney positions within the Federal Government, and high level executives in giant industries such as insurance and pharmaceuticals. These are alumnae whose careers bear watching as they quickly maneuver through the public and private world to conquer the challenges that lie ahead and to encourage others to do the same.



Katherine Corry Eastman '00

People literally put their lives in Katherine Eastman's hands. She is Deputy State Public Defender for the State of Colorado. "I carry a caseload of 80 to 100 cases at a time," Ms. Eastman said. "It is my responsibility to see that indigent people accused of crimes are treated fairly in court. I try cases and continually negotiate with the prosecution for plea bargains." Eastman just recently was second chair on a first degree murder trial for the very first time and is now serving as first chair attorney on another first degree murder trial. Her career is just what she hoped it would be. "Before going to Washburn Law, I clerked for a juvenile judge in Colorado Springs, and I saw public defenders in court every day. Later, as a law student, I interned with the Kansas Public Defender's Appellate Office and

helped with two death penalty cases that were on appeal at that time. In addition, I was a staff writer for the Law Journal and had two pieces selected for publication. Those experiences solidified my goal of being a public defender. "I can't imagine doing any other job," she said. Eastman also serves as a mentor for the Department of Human Services Project Redirect Program which targets at-risk kids and their families by providing intensive intervention through mentors to provide the children with a positive direction in life.



Gwynne E. Harris-Birzer '92

Gwynne Harris-Birzer is an ambitious woman. As a child, she didn't hear much about going to college. It wasn't expected in her family.

Undeterred, she worked, attended

college part time, and earned her law degree at Washburn University School of Law while serving as guardian for a young niece.

Her career has been equally impressive, for she champions the causes of women and children wherever she is. As Assistant District Attorney for Shawnee County, Kansas, she prosecuted all rape, incest, sexual battery, and physical abuse of children cases. She provided sexual crime victim consultations and prosecuted cases under the sexual predator law. She made numerous presentations informing the public of functions within the district attorney's office regarding sexual offenses.

Her ultimate goal, however, is to be a judge—a career that requires a broad range of experience. Another bold step—establishing a general practice law firm in Topeka—was required. Five years later, Ms. Birzer handles criminal, civil, domestic, probate, business, adoption, and Guardian Ad Litem for child in need of care cases. Her work has been

recognized by the Kansas Department of Commerce and Housing which honored her with its Women and Minority Owned Business Award for "Most Professional Service." "I'm glad I had the guts to step out and make a go of it," Ms. Birzer said. She is proving that guts and perseverance pay off.



Yolanda Ingram '95

As Assistant Dean for Student Affairs & Director of the Tennessee Institute for Pre-law Studies at the University of Memphis Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law, Yolanda Ingram is giving back some of the knowledge she has obtained over the course of her career. That career has been one of diversity and accomplishment: Attorney with a leading Kansas City, Missouri, law firm: Polsinelli, White, Vardeman, & Shalton; professor at Temple University, Philadelphia; judicial clerk with Judge Jay Daugherty in Kansas City, Missouri; and account representative for Westlaw, a major legal publishing company. The skills developed in those positions enable her to work well with students. She plans and directs the Tennessee Institute for Pre-law's eight-week summer program, counsels law students, serves as liaison to student organizations, and recruits minority students. Ms. Ingram

describes her job as a good fit. "I am a very outgoing person, so spending long hours in the library researching was not suitable for my personality. My work gives me the interactions that I thrive on. It seems that everything that has come before in my life was grooming me for this position," she said.

Jennifer Koepke '00



Two years after graduation, Jennifer Koepke has found that her Washburn Law degree opens doors for her as she pursues a career in Washington, DC. She is legal counsel for the National Voter Fund of the Department of Justice. "When my husband and I moved to the DC area, I wanted to get into politics," Ms. Koepke said. "With persistence, I got my wish and found my first position as staff counsel for the Democratic National Committee's Voting Rights Institute. Since then I've moved on to the Department of Justice. My time at Washburn Law taught me to look at things from all perspectives and to be broad-minded. That attitude is important in the work I am doing."

Heather Lorenz '01

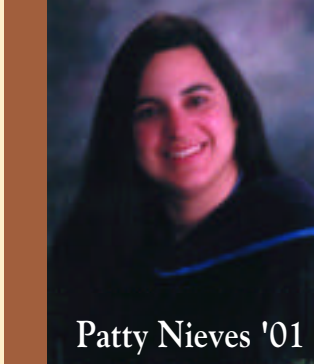


Although she has been out of law school less than two years, Heather Lorenz is well on her way in her legal career. Immediately following graduation, she joined Shook, Hardy & Bacon as an associate in the firm's National Products Liability Litigation Group in Miami, Florida. In addition, Ms. Lorenz is contributing to the legal profession through involvement with the American Civil Liberties Union and its Legal Panel in Miami. "This work is important to me, because I passionately believe in individual rights and freedoms, such as freedom of speech and religion. I also believe that everyone has the right to counsel even if they are financially unable to pay, so I'm involved in pro bono work," Ms. Lorenz said. "As I look back, I realize how very fortunate I am to have attended Washburn Law. The dedicated faculty made sure that when I walked out into the legal profession I was prepared to tackle any legal challenge," Ms. Lorenz said.



Jenifer Lucas '75

"If someone had told me when I graduated from high school in Independence, Kansas, that I would ultimately be a lawyer in Washington, DC, working on cases of national significance, I would have thought that person was crazy," said Jenifer Lucas. But that is just what she is doing. Ms. Lucas is an attorney-adviser at the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, which regulates the interstate transportation of electricity, natural gas, and oil. Her work is primarily in the area of oil and gas pipelines and the drafting of orders for the Commission's consideration. "It is a huge privilege to work on things that directly affect the lives of others, and that trust should never be taken lightly," she said. "I would encourage law students and young lawyers to believe that what they do really does make a difference, no matter how small or large the case or issue may be."



Patty Nieves '01

Patty Nieves is passionate about Indian Law. She is ICWA attorney/Tribal Council at the Tribal Justice Center of the Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP) in Bethel, Alaska. She came to that post following a law clerkship at the Superior Court in Bethel, Alaska. Her work is providing direct assistance to Indian families and leading to improvements in the tribal courts system. "I love what I'm doing," Ms. Nieves said. "I represent the 56 villages in the Y-K Delta of Alaska in state court matters involving the removal of native children from their homes and assist the tribes in getting children's cases transferred from state court to tribal court." In addition, she is helping the tribes establish and operate their own courts, training tribal court personnel, and assisting in the drafting of tribal policies, ordinances, and laws.



Patrice Petersen Klein '97

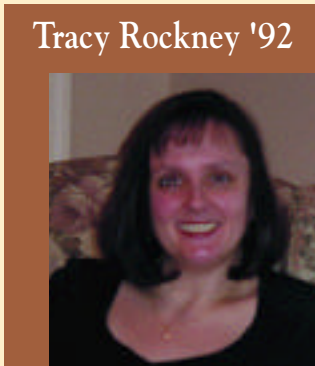
As Research Attorney to Chief Justice Kay McFarland of the Kansas Supreme Court, Patti Petersen-Klein feels she has found her niche in the legal profession. "I research and write about issues that are presented by parties whose cases are on appeal to the Kansas Supreme Court," she said. "I also have duties which involve assisting Justice McFarland in her role as the top judicial officer in Kansas." Ms. Petersen-Klein came to the law following a successful career as a "commercial banker for large money-center organizations. I was always drawn to positions where business was indistinguishably intertwined with law, so when it was time to transition from the banking business, I knew law was where I wanted to be," she said.

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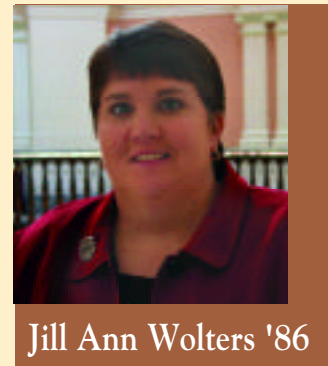
Lori Rinaldi '97

Lori Rinaldi managed to simultaneously earn two degrees--a JD and an MBA--while attending Washburn Law. Now she is putting the organizational skills she used for that balancing act to work in her dual career as a full-time trial lawyer and a full-time wife and mom. Ms. Rinaldi is house counsel for Progressive Insurance Company. She practices automobile defense litigation, representing Progressive's insureds who are being sued following an accident. She also represents Progressive in coverage suits. Her strengths as a trial lawyer were developed in Moot Court while at Washburn Law, in her first job as judicial clerk for a trial court, and in positions at two trial law firms practicing employment law, defense litigation, premise liability, commercial law, and construction law. "Participating in Moot Court gave me the self-confidence that has allowed me to believe I can do anything I want to, and so far I have," Ms. Rinaldi said.



Tracy Rockney '92

Tracy Rockney's work has an impact on the health care available to thousands of people. She is Director of Worldwide Regulatory Affairs for Wyeth Pharmaceuticals in St. Davids, Pennsylvania. In that capacity, she is involved in the distribution of pharmaceuticals for the treatment of major illnesses including cancer. "Although I don't practice law, it would be very difficult to do the job that I do without a legal background," Ms. Rockney said. "I manage a group of regulatory professionals that is responsible for the post-approval regulatory activities for Wyeth's oncology, neuroscience, and musculo-skeletal products. Our role is to work with the marketing department on developing appropriate and compliant advertising and promotional campaigns, to develop appropriate labeling for all Wyeth products, and to seek and facilitate approval of new indications for our products with the Food and Drug Administration."



Jill Ann Wolters '86

Jill Ann Wolters' work as Assistant Revisor of Statutes for the State of Kansas has the potential to affect key state policies. "I work closely with the legislators, providing research, offering legal advice, and recommending legislation to update or clarify existing laws," Ms. Wolters said. Her assignments include the State Legislature's Joint Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice Oversight, the House Judiciary Committee, and the House Education Committee. "I draft legislation, committee reports, and floor amendments and provide assistance in legislative procedural matters," Ms. Wolters said. Her interest in legislative work was piqued in 1983, when she had a Washburn Law internship with Mike Hayden, then speaker of the Kansas House of Representatives. A law clerkship in the Revisor of Statutes Office followed in 1986, and she joined the Office staff later that year. "My solid education in Kansas law and the strong legal research skills I developed at Washburn Law are invaluable in my work," Ms. Wolters said.