

Question & Answer

Karla Jones-Wilson discusses working remotely, acquiring and restoring historic properties.

By Annie Flachsbarth

Not one to sit idly by, **Karla Jones-Wilson, '03**, is always looking for the next investment in her future.

Jones-Wilson received a bachelor of science degree in industrial engineering from Purdue University and worked as an engineer for seven years before looking for more in the form of a law degree from Washburn University School of Law. Then she went on to receive a master of law in taxation from the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law.

For the past 12 years, she's served as general counsel and CLO for Foutch Brothers, LLC in Kansas City, Missouri, where she assists with the complexities of using historic tax credits and other public financing incentives to acquire and restore historic commercial and mixed-use properties worth more than \$275 million. It just so happens that for the past two years, Jones-Wilson has been able to work remotely from Lakewood Ranch, Florida, where she now lives with her family. In addition to being an attorney, she is also a realtor with Florida Life Team LLC, a concierge real estate brokerage in Sarasota, Florida. She and her husband, Bradley Wilson, work together to help high-end buyers and sellers, as well as investors, with their real estate needs in the greater Sarasota area.

Here, Jones-Wilson shares about her work with Foutch Brothers, LLC, as well as some of the opportunities and challenges that come from working with historic properties.

What is Foutch Brothers, LLC and what is your role with the company? Foutch Brothers, LLC is a one-stop shop real estate development company that specializes in the redevelopment of historic buildings in Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and Iowa. Our goal is to preserve history one building at a time. Initially, some of the buildings may be an eyesore because they may be blighted or abandoned. We utilize historic tax credits and various public financing incentives to redevelop historic buildings and turn them into thriving loft style apartments, mixed-use residential and retail spaces, and sports arenas. My job duties entail advising the company of the best legal entity to use for each project, conducting transactional work related to our real estate development, which includes reviewing and drafting various types of contracts, tax credit syndication agreements, financing documentation, as well as working with our investors and

communicating with various government agencies. Although I work remotely now, I've been with the company for 12 years and have established a great rapport with all of our business partners and have a great arsenal of resources at my fingertips.

What are some of the complexities of working with historic properties? There may be a chance that a building we want to redevelop may be in bad shape either falling apart or crumbling. To ensure we can move forward with historic rehabilitation, we hire structural engineers to conduct testing and to make assessments on whether a building has enough structural integrity to rehabilitate.

Our in-house architects complete and submit historic applications to the State Historic Preservation Office and U.S. National Park Service to place our buildings on the National Register of Historic Places and to ensure every building we want to rehabilitate qualifies as a historic building eligible to receive historic tax credits. Once the building is placed on the National Register of Historic Places, the National Park Services must approve all of the rehabilitation work conducted on each building. As a result of this approval process, unplanned costs could be added to the rehabilitation budget if we are required to modify our plans to meet specific historic rehabilitation standards.

Can you share some of the more notable properties you have helped with? The Equitable Building located in downtown Des Moines, Iowa, is a high-rise historic office building we converted into mixed use, residential loft style apartments and retail spaces, which includes a rooftop terrace and fitness center. Across the street from the Equitable is another historic high-rise office building conversion we redeveloped called the Des Moines Building, which features two rooftop decks with amazing views of downtown Des Moines. One of the most recent projects we redeveloped in Kansas City, Missouri, is the Hy-Vee Arena, which is the formerly known historic Kemper Arena. We added a second floor to the Arena and converted it into an indoor sports and retail facility. Another recent property we redeveloped in Kansas City, Missouri, called JPII Commons and Student Housing is located very close to the University of Missouri-Kansas City and Rockhurst University campuses. We converted a former historic Catholic school center into much needed student housing.



Karla Jones-Wilson. Photo by Karen Engel Photography

The best part of my job is seeing the finished buildings. It's always great to see an ugly, blighted building transform into a beautiful, unique property where people want to visit or live. Some of our properties are actually old, historic school buildings that we converted into loft style apartments. It is great when you are in an apartment and see a chalkboard in the kitchen because it was part of the original historic feature of a former school.

Washburn Law recently adopted a new program where third-year law students can take online classes remotely. Do you think a program like that would have benefited you?

Yes. It's an excellent option, especially for those students who could benefit from working during the school year with a law firm in a different geographical location to gain more practical experience. By the third year of law school, you are able to handle more and taking an online class while working is definitely feasible. My oldest son was born right before my last semester of law school, and I worked as an extern for a law firm in Kansas City, Missouri. During that time, it would have been a great

option to take an online class from home to cut down on my 50-minute drive time.

Was it a big jump to go from the engineering field to the law?

No. Actually, being an engineer prepared me for law school. As an engineering student, I studied a lot and was trained to analyze and process information methodically. When everyone else was sleeping, I was up studying. I applied that same process and work ethic to law school. I treated law school like a job. I arrived by 8 a.m. every day and stayed until 5 p.m. every evening whether I had class or not and studied in between classes, as well as during the evenings.

My husband and I moved from Waukesha, Wisconsin, to Kansas City, Kansas, so I could attend Washburn Law. I chose Washburn Law because the professors were easily accessible and welcoming. The Law Clinic also had a great reputation. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to participate in the Law Clinic during my last year. It was impactful to be able to help real clients with real life situations. Attending Washburn Law was a great experience!