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Bond adapts to attorneys' changing needs

BY DENISE M. CHAMPAGNE

Changes in society are being reflected in the way law firms operate.

Take Bond, Schoeneck & King PLLC, for example. The firm, according to its newest partner, Ingrid C. Palermo of Penfield, has a culture of flexibility and investing in its people and each other.

Palermo was recently named partner even though she is technically a part-time attorney, billing less hours than a full-time attorney, but still working enough hours that would be considered full-time in "a normal job."

Palermo, who joined the firm in 2009, likes the flexibility that allows her to tailor her schedule to represent her clients and devote time to her family, which includes three children.

She is the firm's first female part-time partner in the Rochester office, which opened in 2008. She said there are two in the Syracuse office: Christa Richer Cook and Suzanne O. Galbato.

"It's almost unheard of," Palermo said, referring to part-time partnerships. "It's a great opportunity to get a group of partners that really care about each other. It's because our firm values good people."

Edward P. Hourihan Jr., the office's managing attorney, said flexible scheduling and reduced hours are not just for women attorneys, but to allow people to balance their busy lives with their practices. He said Bond gets it right because the firm recognizes that just because people may take time off for families or whatever, it does not mean they have left their career path.



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Edward P. Hourihan Jr., managing attorney in the Rochester office of Bond, Schoeneck and King PLLC, and Ingrid C. Palermo, its newest "part-time" partner, pose at the firm's Linden Oaks office.

He said the emphasis is on true partnerships, not necessarily making partner, a rank Bond refers to as a member.

"Some people don't want to be an equity partner in a law firm, but their contribution is equally important to the success of the firm," Hourihan said. "We want all of our lawyers to succeed and get to where they want to be professionally, irrespective of life paths and twists and turns. I think it's unique because often times, law firms will clearly delineate partnership and non-partnership tracks."

Hourihan said if attorneys leave for five

years to raise a family, a lot of times that five years will be discounted.

"I think that does a disservice to the individual," he said. "The attorney is still developing and moving along. Firms that still adhere to strict partnership tracks are very behind what is going on in the profession. It's all about flexibility. It's the right thing to do and it's profitable to allow flexible work schedules."

Palermo worked full-time before joining Bond, but reduced her hours after her first child was born. She now has three children: Caroline, 11; John, 9; and Ava, 7.

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Her husband, John C. Palermo, is also an attorney with a litigation practice at Gallo & Iacovangelo LLP.

“My mother died when I was 10,” Palermo said. “I never wanted my kids to feel like they didn’t have their mom or their dad. I always wanted them to know how important they are to us. I love what I do, but I love my kids too.”

Palermo acknowledges she is fortunate to have a very involved husband and mother-in-law, Maria Palermo, who lives with them, which gives her time to be part of her children’s activities.

She said the key to balancing work and family obligations is being organized. Family events are listed on a big calendar so everybody knows what is coming up and can plan accordingly, although she admits some of the best laid plans may be altered by work obligations.

Palermo, who grew up in Colorado, where she skied, biked and played tennis, remains active, starting her day with a workout at the YMCA, which she said helps clear her mind. It is also her “me” time.

The firm, which Hourihan said is the largest in New York not based in Manhattan, has 12 women partners. It has 225 attorneys, including 25 in Rochester, and additional offices in Syracuse, Buffalo, Utica, other parts of New York and in Florida and Kansas.

Palermo, a 1996 graduate of Western New England College School of Law,

where she met her husband, began her career in the U.S. Attorney General’s Honors Program in the U.S. Trustee’s Office for the Eastern District of New York.

She later worked for Judges Conrad B. Duberstein and Laura Taylor Swain, at the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Eastern District of New York, overseeing Chapter 11 cases. Judge Duberstein died in 2005 and Judge Swain now sits on the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York.

Before joining Bond’s Rochester office, Palermo worked for Harter Secrest & Emery LLP. She also served as a law clerk to Chief Bankruptcy Judge John C. Ninfo II, U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Western District of New York, who retired at the end of 2011.

She said she is grateful for all she learned from Judge Ninfo and Harter Secrest, but left the firm to join Bond, which had opened its Rochester office less than a year before with Hourihan, Timothy M. Fitzgerald, Brian Laudadio, Peter C. Lutz and Gregory J. McDonald.

“To be able to build something from the ground up was an opportunity I couldn’t pass up,” Palermo said.

She now represents cities, towns, taxing authorities and entities seeking to acquire assets from distressed companies and has a national practice representing creditors and debtors in out-of-court workouts, foreclosure actions, bankruptcy proceedings

and commercial litigation. In fact, she has three clients for whom she does all of their bankruptcy work in the United States.

She has been part of the reorganization of a large Syracuse hospital, provided advice to healthcare organizations on financial restructuring and commercial construction companies on lien law and collection matters, and been involved with restructuring and foreclosing real estate projects including ski resorts, apartment buildings, golf courses and shopping centers.

In addition, Palermo represents multinational corporations in all U.S. bankruptcy matters, is a frequent speaker on bankruptcy and foreclosure issues, and has written on both topics.

“I enjoy it because I view law as a noble profession,” Palermo said. “People come to you in a time of crisis or a time of need. They look to you for your support. In general, people come to a lawyer needing your help and guidance and I think it’s a wonderful opportunity and an amazing responsibility.”

She is a member of the American Bankruptcy Institute, the state and Monroe County bar associations, the MCBA’s Lawyers for Learning program; the International Women’s Insolvency & Restructuring Confederation; and the St. Joseph School Board, where she is chair of the finance committee.

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