

Anne L. Bjerken

Gray Plant Mooty

Born: Feb. 21, 1980; South St. Paul, Minn.

Education: University of Minnesota Law School, J.D., 2005; College of St. Catherine, B.A., 2002

Employment: Gray Plant Mooty, associate, 2007-present; Rider Bennett, associate, 2006-07; Lehmann & Lutter, associate, 2005-06

Professional Associations: Minnesota State Bar Association, Minnesota Women Lawyers

Community Activities: Chrysalis Pro Bono Safety Project, International Institute for Women Entrepreneurs, South St. Paul Restorative Justice Council, Wills for Heroes, Wingspan Life Resources Board of Directors

Hobbies/Interests: Broomball, golf, reading, running, traveling, walking her Boston terrier

Family: Husband, Nicholas

What would you do upon learning that you'd be unemployed soon? Why, naturally, you'd run a half-marathon.

OK, so maybe that's not the customary response for most people. But it seemed like the most sensible course of action for attorney Anne L. Bjerken when she learned that Rider Bennett was closing its doors.

Instead of putting everything on hold, Bjerken flew to San Diego to run the Rock 'n' Roll Half Marathon last June. Not only did she complete the 13.1-mile race, but also raised nearly \$4,000 for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society.

Job-wise, Bjerken landed soundly on her feet at Gray Plant Mooty handling trusts and estate planning. And she still performs myriad hours of professional and community service.

Bjerken feels strongly about pro bono: "I think as lawyers we have special skills that other people don't, and I think it's our duty to give back. Because I do estate planning, I generally spend a lot of time helping to make relatively wealthy people pass that wealth to future generations and minimize taxes, which is important and I love the personal contacts and challenges that work entails. But I just feel I need to balance that out once in while and sometimes try to do pro bono in areas where I have peripheral interests, but don't necessarily want to practice in."

In that first category, Bjerken says volunteering for the Minnesota State Bar Association's Wills for Heroes program is "an easy fit, because I can use my skills as an estate planner for the greater good." The program assists police and emergency medical personnel with simple estate planning documents such as wills, health care directives, powers of attorney and life insurance beneficiary designations.

As for her work with Chrysalis, the goal is to help battered women obtain harassment restraining orders and orders for protection. "It's a give and take for me," Bjerken says. "It helps me keep my litigation skills somewhat fresh, and it allows me to help a population I care about."

In addition, Bjerken donates more than 100 hours each year to the board of directors of Wingspan Life Resources, a Minneapolis nonprofit that operates home-based residential facilities for adults with developmental disabilities.

"I've learned so much from the other members, and I think they do great things," Bjerken says. "They provide a loving, family atmosphere in real homes for people who aren't quite independent, but aren't necessarily completely dependent, either."

Elsewhere in the community, Bjerken has just completed her "circle leader" training for the South St. Paul Restorative Justice Council. This will enable her to mediate disputes — in her hometown — using the restorative justice approach.

Bjerken says the women in her family were role models for energetic volunteerism.

"I get a little bit of the workaholic bug from my grandma, who continues to be a huge volunteer," she says. "And my mom's a CPA who never sleeps, and still manages to serve the community."

— Jane Pribek



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