

Rising Star - Kimberly J. Gustafson

by David R. Punzak



Though Kim Gustafson was born in Worcester, Massachusetts, she moved to St. Petersburg at an early age. She attended locals (Tyrone Elementary and Middle School, and Dixie Hollins High School) and then moved to Gainesville, where she received her undergraduate degree in 1996, and her law degree in 1999, both with Honors. In law school, Kim was a member of the Order of the Coif, and was a Public Service Law Fellow for The Florida Bar Foundation. To this day, Kim is proud of being a “Double Gator”, and she attends Gator football games when she is able.

Unlike some past Heroes Among Us Award winners, Kim really doesn't point to any one individual who served as her “volunteer mentor”, who instilled in her a strong sense of volunteerism and public service. Instead, she described those traits as coming to her in an evolutionary manner. Kim grew up in a working class family, and was always very in tune to the less fortunate in our society. Kim quickly discovered that education was the key to her personal and financial success, and, ultimately, to a better life.

Once Kim started practicing law, first for three years at the State Attorney's Office in Jacksonville, where she prosecuted crimes against women and children, and then at the

Gardner, Wilkes law firm in Tampa, where she practiced three years, Kim always felt a strong sense of duty or obligation to give back to the community. Having been the first person in her family to go to college, and having always held jobs through high school and college, Kim understands and sympathizes with those less fortunate, and she feels an obligation to try to help those in need whenever she can. When Kim joined Carlton Fields six years ago, she immediately got the sense that the firm not only encouraged, but required, its young lawyers to perform pro bono work and to give back to the community. Carlton Fields has been a perfect fit for Kim.

Kim's volunteer activities and community service are very broad based. In her Bar-related work, Kim has held the following positions for The Florida Bar: Federal Court Practice Committee (2008 – Present); Board of Governors, Young Lawyers Division (2008 – Present); Secretary, Young Lawyers Division (2008 – 2010); Annual Convention Committee Chair (2010 – 2011); Communications Committee Chair (2011 – 2012); and Professionalism Committee Co-Chair (2011 – 2012).

Kim has also served as a Fellow for The Florida Bar Foundation, and is a Fellow for the American Bar Foundation. Locally, for the St. Petersburg Bar Association, Kim has served in the following capacities: Executive Committee (2008 – 2010; 2011); Treasurer (2011); Secretary (2009 – 2010); Young Lawyers Section, Chair (2008 – 2009); and Law Week Committee Chair (2006 – 2008).

As if her Bar-related activities were not enough, Kim also has been a very active volunteer in the St. Petersburg community, taking on a number of leadership positions. Her activities include: Bayfront Health Foundation – (Bayfront on Vine Committee

– 2011 -); and member, Future Leaders in Philanthropy; the St. Pete Chamber of Commerce (Young Professionals Executive Board – 2007 – 2010); Young Professionals, Chair (2009); and ACT Committee, Chair (2008). She is also the recipient of the St. Pete Chamber of Commerce “Young Professional of the Year Award” for 2008. Kim has been a Suncoaster since 2009, and currently serves as Vice-President/ Executive Committee, and Co-Chaired the Grand Prix Committee. She also won the Suncoasters' “Sunny Award” in 2010 for the greatest Suncoaster volunteer. For a number of years, Kim has assisted with handing out free food and clothing to the homeless for a local nonprofit organization called “We Feed the Hungry, Inc.”

Kim has also served for the Florida Children's First organization; has volunteered for the Lawyers for Literacy; volunteered for Habitat for Humanity; and was a member of the Leadership St. Petersburg Class of 2007. Lastly, Kim was recently selected for inclusion in Florida Trend's 2011 Legal Elite, in the area of commercial litigation.

Kim and her husband, Bryon, live on St. Pete Beach, where they take care of their three dogs (or her “children” as she calls them). Kim is an avid outdoors person, and loves boating, running, and the whole beach lifestyle. Kim also loves the Tampa Bay Rays, and can often be found at the games, cheering the Rays on.

The St. Pete Bar Foundation is proud to honor Kim as a “Heroes Among Us – Rising Star”.

David R. Punzak is the Managing Shareholder of the Carlton Fields' St. Petersburg Office. A member of the St. Petersburg Bar since 1985, David was honored as a St. Petersburg Bar Foundation “Heroes Among Us” in 2011 and is currently listed in The Best Lawyers in America, Real Estate edition.