

Honoring the Heroes Among Us

Pam Campbell: Character, Competence, Commitment

By Janet Leiser

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Photo by Janet Leiser

A speeding car slammed into Pamela Campbell's vehicle as she sat at a red light during a blinding snowstorm in Washington, D.C., in 1984. The violent jolt changed her life forever. It took months for Pam, then a special assistant to U.S. Sen. Paula Hawkins, R-Fla., to regain use of her right arm. She returned home to St. Petersburg to heal. She attended physical therapy three times a week for six months. When she received an insurance settlement, she used it to chase her dream of becoming a lawyer. Since being admitted to the bar in 1989, she has exemplified what Chesterfield Smith has cited as the three elements of professionalism; character, competence and commitment.

"In this 'bottom line' world, Pam consistently obtains results that are aligned with her clients' strategies and goals," wrote Robert Decker, a colleague and friend in his nomination of Pam for the 2003 St. Petersburg Bar Association and Gulf Coast Business Review Professionalism Award. At the same time, she "has the ability to lead without others realizing they are being led, to offer insights and suggest alternate methods to solve problems without being condescending or arrogant."

She worked her way through junior college as a clerk-typist, delivering mail to the judges, helping people at the counter and typing documents. Beach and Pinellas-Pasco Circuit Judge Thomas Penick were among her mentors.

After obtaining an associates degree in 1974, Pam worked as a legislative aide to Rep. Curt Kiser, a Clearwater lawmaker. She worked for Kiser in Tallahassee for five years. In 1980, Circuit Judge Ray Ulmer appointed her as an administrator for a large land receivership. When she completed that job in 1982, she went to work for Hawkins in Washington.

After the car wreck, Kiser flew her back to Pinellas County on a chartered jet so her parents, Bob and Mary Ann Meacomes, could care for her. Pam eventually returned to Washington, but she couldn't take the stress of the legislative job along with her still-healing injuries. She returned to Pinellas to work as an account executive for Associated Consulting Group, a national firm specializing in governmental affairs.

She completed her bachelor's degree at the University of South Florida in 1985 and she started law school in 1986. Since graduating with a law degree in 1989, Pam has served as president of the St. Petersburg Bar Association, 1998-99; as president of the Stetson Alumni Association, 2001-02; and on the executive committee of the Masterson Inns of Court.

Her public service includes membership on the St. Petersburg Health Facilities Authority, the St. Petersburg Bar Foundation Board of Trustees, the Bayfront Health

Systems Institutional Review Board and the Florida Children's Campaign Board of Directors. She has also served on the board of Operation PAR (Parental Awareness and Responsibility) is a non-profit drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility which is based in St. Petersburg, Florida, and the Florida Board of Medicine.

Jack Helinger calls Pam an "absolutely outstanding person and a lawyer. She's beyond just being friendly. She has a good heart. To her credit, she brings that good heart to her lawyering skills. The (Terri) Schiavo case was obviously the most noteworthy. That is a case that reasonable minds can differ as to what's right and what's wrong. But she brought not only her legal abilities to that case, but also her personal good heart and passions."

For Pam, the Schiavo right-to-life lawsuit was among her toughest cases. She took the lawsuit in 1998 at the request of malpractice attorney Glenn Woodworth. "I met with the family (Bob and Mary Schindler) and looked at some of the records and thought this was really sad that these poor parents weren't ready to let their daughter go," Pam says.

As a result of the Schiavo suit, Pam says she has become more aware of people who have disabilities and their daily struggles. "It was truly a blessing for me to have been involved in that case," she says. "I see brain injured people like Terri who are now walking and talking and able to participate joyfully in their life. I'm much more aware of the rights of the disabled."

Born in North Carolina, Pam and her family moved to St. Petersburg when she was 5. Her father was a salesman at Sears, her mother a housewife. She graduated from Lakewood High School in 1973 with the intention of becoming a legal secretary. She always had an interest in the law. She just didn't think she could afford law school. Others, including judges Beach, Ray Ulmer, Mark McGarry and Thomas Penick and junior college professor Barbara Whitney Hartwell, encouraged her to become an attorney. "They told me, 'You need to keep going to school. You need to go on and become a lawyer,'" she says.

Although she no longer works as a lobbyist, she remains active in politics. She is a member of the Suncoast Tiger Bay Club and a former board member for the organization. "One of our greatest rights as Americans is our responsibility to speak out and participate," she says.

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Janet Leiser is a Senior Editor with the Gulf Coast Business Review.