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In addition to mentoring fellow attorney Meghan Fleming, **Karen Ann Ulmer P.C.'s** Russell Manning guides clients through a host of family law and real estate matters.

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Family Matters

Even as the law firm of **Karen Ann Ulmer P.C.** has grown and expanded in the 21 years since its founding, families still come first.

by **BILL DONAHUE**

photography by **GABRIELA BARRANTES** and **JODY ROBINSON**

When Karen Ann Ulmer co-founded the law firm of Curtis & Ulmer P.C. in 2000, she was inspired by a central idea: Nothing is more important than family.

At the time of the firm's founding, Ulmer was a single parent of a four-year-old daughter. She wanted her firm to serve clients who were in similar situations, and also to have the flexibility to be intimately involved in her daughter's life. She made the time to provide the kind of parenting every young child needs to thrive, and was actively involved in all of her daughter's activities.

"My experience as a single parent very much influenced what I wanted this firm to represent," Ulmer says. "Our culture has always been to put family and children first. We can't control the court system, but we can provide flexibility in work schedules, because

we never want our employees to miss an important family event because of work."

The Langhorne-based firm, which became Karen Ann Ulmer P.C. in 2001, has since expanded its legal team and grown its expertise beyond family law, although family law remains the core practice area. While the majority of the firm's casework continues to involve matters such as divorce, custody, support, protections from abuse, and grandparent rights, the firm now includes attorneys with proficiency in estate and probate matters, real estate, adoptions, and dependency matters.

Despite its growth, the firm has retained its "family first" mentality. Employees are encouraged to attend their children's activities, and the firm provides flexible work at home on days that children have off from school or pets need extra care. The firm also welcomes employees to bring their children and pets to the office, when needed. In fact, Ulmer's daughter worked for the firm for seven years after graduating high school, and became



Russell Manning, a senior associate, mentors fellow attorney Meghan Fleming, who joined the firm late last year.



Karen Ann Ulmer, founding attorney (left), and April M. Townsend, partner

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Karen Ann Ulmer P.C. maintains a central office at 174 Middletown Blvd., Suite 300, in Langhorne, Pennsylvania, and also has offices in Doylestown, Jenkintown, and King of Prussia.
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an integral part of Karen Ann Ulmer P.C.

Having met family members and the occasional pet in the office has helped to bond employees together, and made them sympathetic to each other's needs. That kind of compassion carries over to client interactions, as employees are very sympathetic to the clients they serve.

Ulmer and her fellow attorneys strive to advise parents and spouses about their rights, and to provide the information they need to make educated decisions. That's why Ulmer decided to give every prospective client a complimentary copy of her e-book, *Surviving Divorce in Pennsylvania: Getting Through a Difficult Time – A Guide*. Ulmer wants her clients to be informed and know their options and instills the same values in those who work at the firm.

"My philosophy is to ask myself, 'How would I like to be treated?'" adds Russell Manning, a senior associate who joined the firm in 2017. "In general, I try to keep things as amicable as possible. I'm here to deal with the stress of the process so [clients] don't have to. I also understand that sometimes you can't be amicable. When it's time not to be, I can be as aggressive as needed. It all boils down to, if I was the client, what would I want from my attorney?"

Manning focuses his practice in family law, including representing clients in divorce and custody hearings, as well as in real estate matters. He also provides guidance and representation in matters involving Children & Youth Services, in which families may be investigated for allegations of abuse and neglect.

He appreciates the fact that the firm encourages participation in outside interests and allows the time to do so. For his part, he likes to fence every Friday, volunteers in political causes, and nurtures his interest in history. Of course, he also enjoys spending time with his family, which includes two

daughters and his wife, who is a teacher.

Manning took on a new role with the firm in the past year: a mentor to Meghan Fleming, a Massachusetts native who earned her Juris Doctor from New England Law | Boston. Since Fleming joined Karen Ann Ulmer P.C. in September 2020, Manning has come to appreciate her as "a very good attorney who's focused on serving our clients."

Fleming says Manning's mentorship has made her feel as though she's "growing each day." She also credits Ulmer and April M. Townsend, a partner with the firm, for adding to her knowledge base.

In addition to expanding its services and capabilities to prospective clients, Karen Ann Ulmer P.C. has enhanced its approach to communication, both internally and externally. For example, the firm worked hard to maintain continuity of communication amid the uncertainty of the early days of the pandemic, when all the attorneys were working from home. Also, the attorneys have been participating in regular Zoom meetings to facilitate connectedness, collaboration, and idea sharing.

"We've also been putting out more videos and other interactive resources to educate people, so they feel like they know us even before they pick up a phone," says Tanya Close, an entrepreneur with a passion for business who now serves as the firm's business manager. "I'm also sending out daily news to the entire firm. In addition, we're in the process of creating an employee portal."

During the early months of the pandemic when everyone worked from home exclusively, the firm had daily Zoom meetings to keep employees engaged. Several of the team members at the firm are single parents and understand their clients' struggles; they, too, had to work and educate their children at home who were virtually learning. Ulmer

herself had to adjust her schedule last spring to help her two young boys learn virtually in the morning, and then work afternoons and evenings. Close believes these practices and personal experiences, among others, will better serve the client.

In the 21 years since her firm came to be, Ulmer has grown increasingly proud of what she has built. Karen Ann Ulmer P.C. has become many things: a place where new attorneys learn; a place where clients find the answers they need to move forward with their lives; and, above all, a place where family still comes first.

"When someone is going through a difficult time, like a divorce or a custody dispute, they shouldn't have to feel overwhelmed, wondering about what comes next," she says. "In the beginning, when I was going through many of the same things our clients are going through, I didn't always know all of the resources that were available and where to turn for help. I enjoy offering what I have learned to help others avoid having to learn on their own. We want our clients to know their options. We want them to know that we understand what they're going through, and we're here to help them through the process." ■



Tanya Close, business manager for Karen Ann Ulmer P.C., says the firm has instituted a number of new practices designed to better serve the client.