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Civil Solutions, a new division of the **Raffaele Puppio** law firm, offers divorcing couples a kinder, quicker, more cost-effective alternative to resolving their disputes. page 22

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A Better Path Forward

Civil Solutions, a new division of the **Raffaele Puppio** law firm, offers divorcing couples a kinder, quicker, more cost-effective alternative to resolving their disputes.

by **PHIL GIANFICARO** | photography by **JODY ROBINSON**

Most couples go into a marriage thinking it will last forever. Sometimes, however, marriages crumble, brought about by infidelity, abuse, financial issues, or a combination of those and other factors. Or maybe, as the years passed, one or both partners simply decided on a different kind of future. Whatever the cause, the marriage is irrevocably broken. The next step: divorce.

Choosing the courts to divorce can be wrought with issues neither party desired nor intended, including significant delays—possibly years—due to the hearing process itself and a backlogged court system that has become even more bottlenecked during the COVID-19 pandemic. The expense of litigation can be overwhelming, draining families of income and assets.

Michael A. Raffaele, Esquire, and Robyn E. Musi, Esquire, of Raffaele Puppio, a multi-practice law firm in Media, have seen it many times before. Musi says, “We have divorce cases that have been lingering in the Court system for five to 10 years. The

longer that parties are separated, the harder it is to untangle the financial web that has been created over time. Untangling that web takes considerable time, which means it costs money.”

Musi adds, “Further, once litigation begins, often the emotional toll it takes on people changes their mindset and their ability to make logical, financial decisions is distorted by those emotions.”

The limitations and stressors associated with the traditional divorce process may explain why alternative dispute resolution has gained in popularity. Alternative dispute resolution, or ADR for short, helps parties eliminate those stressors and resolve disputes in a more efficient and far less expensive way.

At the Raffaele Puppio law firm, the delicate nature of divorce is being addressed in a new practice division aptly named Civil Solutions. Recognizing that courts are not always the most effective places to resolve family disputes, Raffaele, the firm’s

founding partner and a family lawyer with over 40 years of experience, and Musi, an associate with Raffaele Puppio for over 10 years and a seasoned family law attorney, created Civil Solutions last year.

Civil Solutions specializes in family law mediation, arbitration, and collaborative law to address and resolve the issues of divorce, property distribution, alimony, spousal support, child custody, and child support—all outside the courtroom. These processes are generally confidential, less formal, more expedient, less expensive, and less stressful than traditional court proceedings.

Raffaele states, “We created Civil Solutions to give people options to the long, hard, and expensive road of divorce-related litigation. Mediation, arbitration, and collaborative law are distinct processes, each with their own advantages. Our clients choose the process which best addresses their needs. Our experience in the family courts of southeastern Pennsylvania and extensive training in conflict resolution set us apart from others providing ADR services.”

A Good, Fair Result

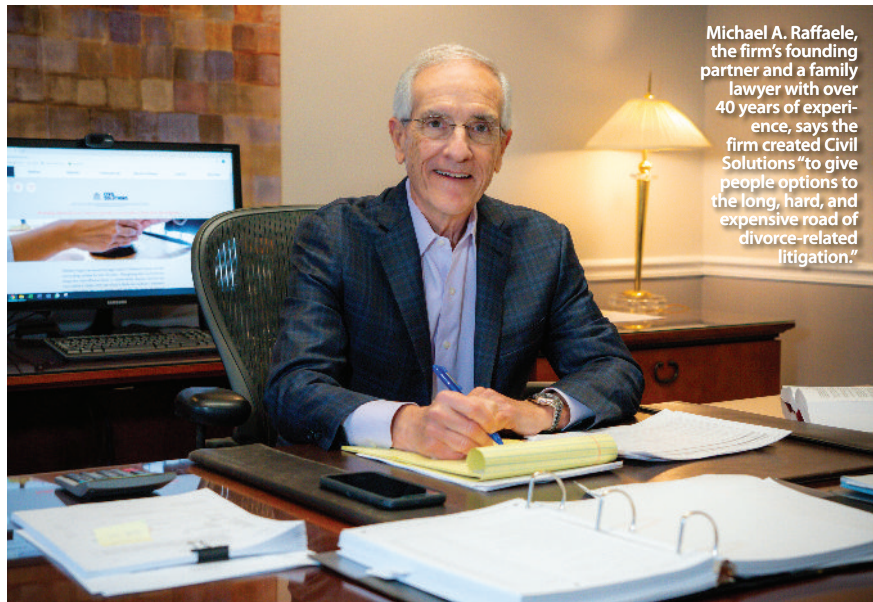
Attorneys Raffaele and Musi have seen firsthand how long divorce proceedings can drag on in the court system. At the same time, they have seen how quickly the process can move during ADR.

In Pennsylvania, before parties can obtain a divorce, the “grounds for divorce”

must be established. If there are marital assets to be distributed and debts to be allocated between spouses, those economic issues must also be addressed by way of agreement or court order. If one party will not consent to the divorce, in most jurisdictions the parties must wait one year from their date of separation to even begin litigating the economic issues. As cases are prolonged, numerous issues typically rise, requiring attention by attorneys. Family law attorneys bill for their services on an hourly basis. The longer a case goes on and the more issues that arise, the more expensive it becomes to the parties. In mediation and collaborative law, the parties can come to an agreement and be divorced within as little as 90 to 120 days. In arbitration, the process takes generally six to nine months.

While Civil Solutions is skilled in all aspects of ADR—arbitration, mediation, and collaborative law—there are subtle differences among the three. In arbitration, parties are generally represented by attorneys who present the case to the arbitrator who serves as a “private judge.” The arbitrator imposes a detailed decision and award upon the parties after considering the evidence presented. The arbitrator’s final decision is generally binding. At a mediation, the parties retain control over the outcome of their issues, and the mediator serves as a facilitator of the parties’ own agreement. In the collaborative law process, the parties are each represented by a collaboratively trained attorney. Experts, including financial and mental health professionals, are used to assist the parties in coming to an agreement. If the parties cannot come to an agreement, the collaborative attorneys cannot represent the parties in litigation. This creates an environment positioned toward open disclosure and effective communication.

Raffaele and Musi each bring their own



Michael A. Raffaele, the firm's founding partner and a family lawyer with over 40 years of experience, says the firm created Civil Solutions “to give people options to the long, hard, and expensive road of divorce-related litigation.”

strengths to Civil Solutions. Raffaele has a wealth of experience in family law, and has been selected by peers on various occasions to serve as a private arbitrator in high-end divorce cases. He is also a trained mediator who uses his decades of expertise to guide parties through the divorce process and to settlement. In recent years, Musi has focused her family practice on negotiation and settlement, helping many clients amicably resolve their differences. She has trained extensively in mediation and collaborative law, and is a respected member of the Association for Conflict Resolution, the Pennsylvania Council for Mediators, the International Academy of Collaborative Professionals, and Collaborative Law Professionals of Southeastern Pennsylvania.

For couples whose marriage has reached the point of no return, or those who have



Civil Solutions

The Family Law Alternative
Dispute Resolution Center
at Raffaele Puppio

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CIVILSOLUTIONSRP.COM**

reached a fork in the road and chosen different paths, or those who decide it's time to dissolve their union for other reasons, Raffaele and Musi believe Civil Solutions may offer the perfect, civil solution. ■



Robyn E. Musi, a seasoned family law attorney and an associate with Raffaele Puppio for over 10 years, has trained extensively in mediation and collaborative law.

About the Attorneys

Raffaele is a founding partner of Raffaele Puppio, and has been a respected family attorney for almost 50 years. He has attained the highest possible rating in legal ability and ethics from Martindale Hubble, the National Legal Directory. He has been selected by his peers as one of Pennsylvania's “Best Attorneys,” one of “America's Outstanding Lawyers,” and a Philadelphia “Super Lawyer.” Raffaele is a trained mediator, and has served as a private arbitrator in family law matters various times.

Musi joined Raffaele Puppio as an associate with the firm in 2009, focusing her practice in the areas of family law: divorce, property distribution, support, and custody. She has been named a Super Lawyer Rising Star each year since 2017, was named by the *Delaware County Times* as a “Best Lawyer” in the areas of Family and Divorce in 2020, and was chosen by *Suburban Life* as a Top Attorney in 2017. Musi is a trained mediator and collaborative attorney.