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READY TO THRIVE

BY BILL DONAHUE | PHOTOS BY NINA LEA PHOTOGRAPHY

LAW OFFICES OF **JENNIFER J. RILEY** EMBRACES INTEGRATIVE WELLNESS AS A TOOL OF EMPOWERMENT TO HELP CLIENTS DISCOVER A PATH TO PROSPERITY IN THE AFTERMATH OF A DIVORCE.

The pandemic underscored the fundamental importance of self-care. This fact was not lost on Jennifer J. Riley, a family law attorney who has always prided herself on representing clients in an environment of warmth, friendliness, and genuine personal connection. The firm has developed and added “a different kind of legal service” to its offerings, endeavoring to incorporate integrative wellness as a balm for clients who are going through a divorce or other challenging cases in family law.

“The pandemic illustrated the fact that clients often rely on attorneys to provide more than just legal services,” says Riley, owner and managing attorney of Law Offices of Jennifer J. Riley, which opened in 2013. “When the pandemic hit, I expected that being home and not having as many outside demands would help people handle the [divorce] process more smoothly and for the legal system to become more complicated, but it was the reverse. We saw clients struggling a lot more, as everyone did, but the legal process was a bit more simplified.”

Riley realized that the firm’s clients often needed more assistance than lawyers are trained to provide. She founded the Integrative Divorce and Wellness Center to connect with mind-body-spirit-financial practitioners who can offer support and guidance to people facing divorce and life’s transitions. She says cooperating with specialized providers has enabled the firm to offer personalized wellness services designed to address multiple areas of client need beyond legal counsel and representation.

Financial advisors can help clients analyze their financial picture and map out a plan for a post-divorce life. Co-parenting counselors can work with parents to determine the best path forward for their families. Support groups and social events will foster community among individuals who are navigating a time of profound transformation. Wellness services such as massage, therapy, personal training, and life coaching will soothe and empower clients every step of the way.

“The legal process of divorce doesn’t necessarily include any level of compassion or empathy,” Riley says. “The process focuses on the economic distribution of assets, but the economic aspect is just a tiny piece of what people are going through. Most of us need emotional support to get through life’s most difficult transitions.”

With her longtime friend, Cara McClintock-Walsh, Ph.D., Riley is developing a program designed to help people facing divorce find community and joy again. They are in the later development stages of a designing a three-month program to help people embrace the mind-body-spirit connection in surviving and thriving through the divorce process. Morganne Hodgson, the firm’s marketing coordinator, has also joined forces with Riley to help launch the new services, designing uplifting, empowering, and “fun” ways to help clients through divorce. Together, Riley and Hodgson have created the Surviving and Thriving Program, wel-

coming their clients and the public to lectures and presentations by specialized providers who offer knowledge and options for life ahead. The lectures and presentations are offered at the firm's office in Wayne, and are designed to provide information to attendees to help power them on their path.

"They also can meet other people facing the same obstacles," Riley adds. "Fostering a supportive sense of community, especially when the divorce process can feel so isolating, is a key reason we are excited about this program."

At the same time, Riley says the firm's legal team has undergone intensive training in tools such as mediation and collaborative divorce, both of which tend to result in healthier outcomes for clients: lower costs, a quicker resolution, and a "kinder, gentler" approach that spares clients from much of the conflict and animosity that can arise in litigation.

"Mediation is a wonderful tool for couples who wish to create their own outcomes," Riley says. "It isn't always easier, but it helps clients maintain control of the process. We're still litigators, and we will litigate as needed, but the great majority of couples don't have to go that route."

"When you have two litigators," she continues, "you have two attorneys who are advocating for their clients and may not want to back down, but that can sometimes result in clients feeling as if their voices are not heard. By taking the approach our firm is taking, which I hope is the start of a trend, we as attorneys can listen more and use more emotional intelligence to know when to back down and when to press forward."

When she shared her integrative-wellness vision with her legal team, she received an overwhelmingly positive response. Further reflection helped her realize the blue-sky reception made complete sense, considering her team's makeup.

"For me, it's integral to have attorneys in the firm who are *good* human beings, and who genuinely care about other people," she says. "They must be skilled attorneys, of course, but kindness is one of our key hiring components. Anybody who holds someone's hand through the divorce process knows how difficult it is. I think each of us wants to help clients shine a little brighter through the process, and this approach will help us accomplish that goal."

She expects the new approach to diminish the amount clients spend on legal services, though people would invest more in themselves. She sees the tradeoff as a win for all involved.

"I believe our clients will get more out of their investment in the long run," she

says. "Imagine the difference we feel between spending money on legal services versus continued self-care and empowerment. Overall, in our society, we are seeing an interesting wellness movement. Going through what we have all gone through over the past few years makes us realize how short and fragile life is. We need this more than ever."

Riley's firm has enjoyed a transformative year in more ways than one. In addition to the collaborative endeavors ahead, the firm invested in a new office in Wayne as a sister to the original office in Blue Bell. As the firm prepares to celebrate its 10-year anniversary in April, Riley expects to host a special event to celebrate the last decade of services, as well as announce key partnerships and formally introduce the firm's expanded services.

Riley appreciates her team's contributions to the firm's steady evolution and growth. She has a special appreciation for her managers, including: Jamie Heckman, a senior paralegal who joined the firm in 2014, and who has played an integral role in the firm's continued growth, expansion, and development; Jason Warburton, Riley's husband, who sacrificed his own career to join her when the firm started growing—"working tremendously long hours, sacrificing weekends, and remaining a steady support through all of the ups and downs of the firm's growth"; and Susan Sherman, her financial services manager, who used her decades of knowledge and experience to help Riley navigate the pandemic when the doors to the offices were closed.

Likewise, Matthew F. Fox, senior attorney at the firm, helped to expand the options available to clients, offering his experience and professional accomplishments to clients and serving as a mentor to new associate attorneys. Most recently, Riley welcomed Kimberly A. Dudick to the team as supervising attorney. In this role, in addition to her client services, Dudick provides additional mentorship and training to the firm's newest associate attorneys.

"Each of these core team members offers experience, compassion, humor, and passion for their work," Riley adds. "Our lawyers are well-respected in the



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legal community and certainly by their clients, and these managing team members are appreciated and loved by our team.

"I've worked hard to build a really good team," she continues. "Everyone here embraces the firm's message and is committed to delivering exceptional client services. I think that comes through in our true happiness in helping our clients move forward with their lives in the healthiest way possible." ■

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