

# suburbanlife

Attorney and Magisterial District Judge **Cathleen Kelly Rebar** embarks on the next chapter of her career in justice.

pg. 40

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by Leigh Stuart  
photos by Jody Robinson

# Sound Judgment

Attorney and Magisterial District Judge **Cathleen Kelly Rebar** embarks on the next chapter of her career in justice.

Sometimes, even after periods of sustained success, leaders get to a point where they decide it's time to embrace a new challenge, begin a new chapter, find a new mountain to climb. Such is the case with Cathleen Kelly Rebar, founder and managing partner of Rebar Kelly, a law firm with multiple offices in five states.

Rebar built the firm with vital contributions from a skilled team of attorneys and support

staff. Success came as a result of holding those around her to the same high standards to which she held herself. This included training new attorneys in what she considered best practices and, in her words, "demanding of them what I demanded of myself."

After 16 years at the firm's helm, Rebar remains just as committed to justice, fairness, and doing "what's right" as the day she started the firm. She'll just be doing it in a different

capacity from this point forward.

Recently Rebar made the bold decision to transition away from legal practice in order to take on more responsibility in her role as a magisterial district judge in Montgomery County. As part of this decision, she integrated her practice into Tyson & Mendes, a powerhouse litigation firm with a national footprint, to ensure that her clients and staff will be well taken care of.

“Tyson & Mendes has invested by hiring every single one of my people,” she says. “Everyone is going to be in great hands, and I feel like it’s their time to shine, so to speak. It’s my time to step away and allow them to do that.”

Rebar found Tyson & Mendes to be an almost perfect match. Not only does Tyson & Mendes handle the same kinds of cases as her firm—civil litigation, professional liability and errors and omissions, product liability, toxic tort, premise liability, security, healthcare, social services, employment practice, etc.—but she also felt that the firm shared her strong work ethic and commitment to supporting clients and combating outsized and unfair nuclear verdicts.

Rebar and Robert Tyson, a founding member of Tyson & Mendes, are both graduates of the Charles Widger School of Law at Villanova, which is where they found their joint passion for trial work and what started the discussion on Rebar Kelly’s transition to Tyson & Mendes. She knows that Tyson & Mendes “is grateful to take on people who it knows operate at a high level and who are as committed as they are to solving their clients’ problems,” she adds. The transition marked the point in Rebar’s legal career where she felt she had accomplished what she set out to do, and with it came a new focus on career.

### **Demanding Excellence, Solving Problems**

Rebar is currently serving her third six-year term as a magisterial district judge. As she looks toward her next election run in 2027, she reflects on her time in the role, as well as her years at the forefront of her own firm, with hope and pride.

“My life’s journey has really been about leaving every situation better than I found it,” she says. “Clients come to us when they have problems, and we have to be bigger than those problems. The needs of the clients and other people [come before] our own personal needs. That is our job as lawyers.”

Rebar has never taken this responsibility lightly. That’s why she has been so intentional about planning the transition.

“I didn’t just announce one day that I’m retiring from my practice of law,” she says.



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—Cathleen Kelly Rebar

“I didn’t feel that that was fair to the clients who trusted me, the insurance carriers who trusted me, and the people who’ve been working for me and dedicated to that same goal for this whole time. I identified what I felt was a better footprint for them to continue their journey, personally, in the practice of law, and these clients will be amazingly serviced by a team of lawyers who share my vision. This transition allows me an exit strategy that I feel good about and that I know leaves everything I built and my team and clients in excellent hands.”

Now, as she prepares for a fourth term as a magistrate judge, Rebar reaffirms her commitment to open-mindedness, fairness, and public safety. A problem-solver by nature, she carefully considers the circumstances of the person involved in each case before her. Each time, she asks herself one very important question as she is contemplating her judgment: *What is the best solution for the individual standing in front of me?*

“I think two things have separated me from the field, so to speak, in all areas of my life,” she says. “One is not something that I can turn off: a very strong, unwavering sense of right and wrong, and always doing the right thing even if it wasn’t the best thing for me. I’ve never been able to stand by and watch an injustice unfold in any situation, even if it didn’t impact me directly.”

Two, she says, is “judgment and empathy in ways that may not always seem empathetic, but which always come from a place of improving the situation before me.” That empathy is hard, she says, “because it sometimes requires you to do what is best for the person and not necessarily the thing they are looking for or wanting from you in that moment.”

The first-generation college graduate in her family, Rebar believes she has gotten to where she is today through a combination of grit, stamina, and tenacity. She applies those same traits in her work on the bench—and will continue to do so if granted a fourth term—to ensure even-handed justice in her community.

“I’ve always looked at those skills as a gift that I had a responsibility to pay forward or use in a way that I felt made the world a better place,” she says. “I will always ensure that I use my talents to the betterment of the world around me, even if sometimes that means I haven’t directly pleased someone in the process. Feeling good and doing good are not the same, I have and will always focus on doing good.” ■

**Cathleen Kelly Rebar**  
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