

# Focused Family Solutions

## MICHELLE M. KNISS

By Haley Freeman

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**Michelle M. Kniss is a well-recognized solo practitioner with a comprehensive family law practice in Minnesota and Wisconsin. A prior business litigator, she is both a zealous advocate and a compassionate counselor.**

**K**niess enjoyed the challenges of the courtroom environment, but found her true passion in family law when she handled a pro bono divorce case as a member of the Volunteer Lawyer's Network (VLN). “Family law gave me an opportunity to connect with my clients in a more personal way and see the impact that my work was having on the lives of real people. After that, I sought a position in a family law firm.”

“I decided to go out on my own in order to have the freedom to handle cases in the way that my personal lawyering style directed. I was confident in my ability to take difficult cases and devise my own strategies. I also wanted to expand my cross-border practice.”

Practicing in both Minnesota and Wisconsin is a benefit to many clients, whose family cases may necessitate representation in both states. Kniss is well-versed in the statutes and cultural nuances of both legal environments. “You may have a parent who lives on the border in Wisconsin and now wants to move into the city to be nearer to work. That can present a lot of issues. Or,

you may have a case where the family has already moved out of the state where the custody order was entered, but now they want to modify that order. Ideally, it is best to have a lawyer who is aware of laws in both states, as you may need to file in both states in order to get to the proper venue and achieve the desired result. And having a single attorney can save the client significant time and money.”

Kniss observes that today's technology makes it easier than it once was for young attorneys to go out on their own. “Through the miracle of the Internet, I was able to transition my practice while establishing my office. I was about eight months pregnant with my son when I started, and I kept my practice going electronically. I don't know that a young woman would have been able to do that even a few years ago.”

Technology also contributes to lower overhead. “The courts have helped out as well by adopting e-filing in most counties. It saves a lot of cost – savings that I can pass along to my clients.”

Kniss contributes time to pro bono repre-

sentation through the Hennepin County Unbundled Legal Service Project and the VLN. Like many compassionate lawyers, she struggles with her desire to assist families in need while maintaining a profitable business. “It's a balancing act – to help more people you have to run a business, and you can't run a business without revenue.” Kniss recently added a paralegal to her practice to assist clients at a lower hourly rate.

Kniss is visible throughout the legal community, as she belongs to several bar associations and is currently serving as secretary and treasurer for the 19<sup>th</sup> District Bar Association. Super Lawyers has named Kniss in its Minnesota Rising Stars list every year since 2011.

“People need someone who can see beyond emotions and calmly identify and advocate for their goal, while also demonstrating empathy during one of the most difficult experiences of their lives. I help clients to remain focused on solutions and long-term outcomes and hopefully send them on their way to a new reality that works for them and their family,” she said.