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A few good women

These friends formed a firm that overturns conventional notions about law practice.

BY RAYGAN SWAN

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Three Indianapolis attorneys are giving the city's legal scene a fresh face.

Armed with enthusiasm, a female perspective and great style, Kena Hollingsworth, Stephenie Jocham and Christina Zivitz recently forged one of the city's youngest, all-female law firms, quashing perceptions of what a lawyer is supposed to be.

"We are open-minded, compassionate women," said Zivitz, 28. "Not three men with folded arms, sitting behind a stack of law books."

The three women, acquaintances through their time at Indiana University Law School in Indianapolis, all have a particular passion for family law, a specialty they say is enhanced by being products of divorced parents.

"We can look at our clients and say, 'I know what you're going through; I've been there,'" said Jocham, a 36-year-old Terre Haute native and mother of two.

"Half the job is spent being a litigant, and the other half is being a counselor and a friend to the client," Zivitz said.

The firm's down-to-earth charm is also an advantage, said Hollingsworth, 29.

The southern Indiana native feels bringing clients into an intimidating conference room with big yellow legal pads isn't the best way to make them comfortable.

Instead, she'll likely invite clients to have a seat on her couch and offer to turn on their favorite soap opera.

"We have an approachable atmosphere that says we are people just like you," she said.

IN IT TOGETHER

A few years after graduation in June 2001, each left their respective firms -- goodbye, stable salaries -- to start their own business.

The women agreed starting an all-female firm so early in their professional careers was uncommon and risky.

Paying your dues by being a little fish in a big pond is generally the first step for young lawyers, Jocham said.

"We just wanted to have some professional fun and blaze our own course," she said.



Firm commitments: From left, Kena Hollingsworth, Stephenie Jocham and Christina Zivitz, began practicing law together in 2001 after finishing school at Indiana University. Their Carmel firm specializes in family and divorce law. -- Michelle Pemberton / INTake

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Nationally, there is a surge in female entrepreneurship, according to the Center for Women's Business Research, a nonprofit research group in Washington, D.C.

As of 2004, 48 percent, or 10.6 million, of privately-held U.S. firms were half- or majority-owned by women -- a 17 percent growth rate from 1997.

In Indiana, the percentage of businesses that were half- or majority-owned by women in 2004 was even higher: 51.7 percent.

Hollingsworth, Jocham and Zivitz said they foresee having hurdles to overcome by being an all-female firm -- and blonde for that matter -- but are confident they will succeed.

Don't let the blonde hair fool ya, Hollingsworth said.

"We can be a bulldog in court with the best of them, and when you have questions, we've got answers."Hollingsworth, Jocham & Zivitz, LLC