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Best OF THE Best
pg. 26

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page 64



+
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STRONGER THAN EVER

As **Testa & Pagnanelli LLC** continues to grow, the family law firm deepens its commitment to providing fierce yet compassionate representation that helps clients move forward.

by **MATT COSENTINO** photos by **JODY ROBINSON**

Although the law practice she founded 16 years ago has since expanded from one location to three, built up its team of experienced attorneys, and earned a reputation for fierce yet compassionate representation in family law cases, growth is not what pleases Maria Testa the most. Rather, she takes pride in the fact that the entire team remains down to earth in their efforts to steer clients through times of turbulence.

“Our firm is very family oriented,” she says. “All of us are close, and it’s an easy and fun environment to be in. Everyone here is approachable; it’s not that big-firm mentality by any means. We actually get a lot of cases from the big firms because of that mentality.”

“We treat clients like family,” she continues. “I always think to myself: *If this were*

me, how would I want this to work out in the most positive way possible? And that’s how I try to proceed in the case: This is the best option for you, this is going to benefit your children the most, and this is how you’re going to set yourself up for your future.”

The firm’s family feel took on a literal meaning when Testa’s twin brother, Enrico J. Pagnanelli, shifted gears from corporate law and became her partner in 2013. Today, Testa & Pagnanelli LLC helps clients tackle a variety of complex divorce and custody cases from its headquarters across from the courthouse in Norristown, in Radnor, and in Center City.

Pagnanelli has been practicing family law for more than a decade. Like his sister, he cherishes the life-changing impact his work can have on clients and their families.

“Litigation can be an awful experience for some people,” he says. “Being responsive and being receptive to not just the issues but also to the emotional implications of them and the effects on their family is very important. We’re not just their lawyers; we’re their friends, their therapists, and their guidance counselors throughout this process.”

As the children of two doctors, the siblings did not necessarily have the law on their radar while they were growing up. They went to separate colleges, and their respective interests led each of them to law school. They never imagined they would become partners someday.

“I think anybody who knew us prior to our business partnership would have been very surprised that we ended up in the same place doing the exact same thing,” Testa

says. “We’re very, very different people. Family law is all I’ve ever done, and when he was unhappy with corporate law, I asked him to join me. We’ve been together ever since, and it’s been great.”

A well-rounded team enables Testa & Pagnanelli to try cases in five different eastern Pennsylvania counties. Each of the firm’s five attorneys, as well as the support staff, was hired because they were deemed “a good fit” for the firm’s distinctive culture. Likewise, each has played a key role in the firm’s success.

“Many of our staff have been with us for many years and have been very open about how they intend to stay here for the duration of their career,” Pagnanelli says. “We’re well known in the area, and many of our referral sources are other attorneys who consistently go to us, especially for the more complex cases. We have extensive experience in all five counties, so we know the people, the procedures, and the processes quite well in those counties.”

One of those relationships helped Testa & Pagnanelli become even more formidable in 2020 when Rebecca Kolsky joined the firm as partner. Kolsky had already been well acquainted with the firm; she had previously tried cases against both siblings.

“I think having cases as adversaries really helped to see that we are very similar in our advocacy for our clients,” Kolsky says. “Even though we were duking it out in the courtroom, at the end of the day we all respected each other and the timing was just right. They were looking, they approached me, and the rest is history.”

Unlike her two partners, Kolsky had been intrigued by family law from a young age based on her own experiences.

“I have two different perspectives: the perspective of being the product of divorced parents; and the perspective of being a parent myself, and knowing what it’s like when your children don’t fit into a box or have different sensitivities,” she says. “A standard schedule might not work in those situations, so I always try to put myself in the children’s shoes as well. I often talk to my clients about how it’s not necessarily about what’s right or fair for the parents; it’s about the children.

“A lot of times my clients find me to be very relatable, and they really appreciate that,” she continues. “Oftentimes it changes their perspective, because they were so stuck in their ways about ‘winning’ or fighting for what they think they’re entitled to.”

Each of the partners, as well as the firm’s associate attorneys, prepares as if each case is going to trial. Having multiple attorneys from whom to seek advice is an invaluable asset in this regard. While the attorneys all enjoy the litigation aspect of family law, they strive to resolve each case as amicably and cost-effectively as possible.

“Not every case can settle, and that is the lesson you learn in year one of practicing law,” Testa says. “When it doesn’t settle and I walk into a courtroom, I know everything [about the case] and I’m ready to go. It’s definitely better for people to try to resolve issues, because it’s so expensive to litigate, and it’s mentally and emotionally taxing.”

Managing client expectations is critical to a positive outcome. That said, Kolsky says no two divorces are the same.

“The judges in divorce and custody cases hear so many cases—thousands per year—so I think it’s really helpful to humanize this case, this parent, this child,” she adds. “What may work for other families might not work for this family, so we have to bring it to the court’s attention what special needs might exist, what both the parents’ and children’s schedules are like, the logistics of where they go to school, the timing, etc., so the court can tailor something that’s best for them that meets their needs as a family.”

Reaching solutions has been incredibly rewarding for the team at Testa & Pagnanelli LLC, whether they’re acting as traditional attorneys, as mediators, or as guardians ad litem, a court-appointed role in which an attorney represent the best interests of the children in a complex case. While each of the firm’s attorneys arrived at family law by way of a different path, they



Maria Testa



Enrico J. Pagnanelli



Rebecca Kolsky

all share the same goal.

“For a lot of people, just getting to the finish line and having closure has immense value for them,” Pagnanelli says. “Our job is not only to give them that closure but also help them move forward, and to do so without prolonging the process.” ■



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