

Along with a physician friend, who was exploring a degree in the new field of bioethics, and a philosopher at UMKC, who had created the only medical school based-health care ethics program in the country, Mary Beth formed a 501(c)3, which is now known as the Center for Practical Bioethics. One of the first projects Mary Beth was involved with at the Center was to get the Bar Association, hospitals and doctors together to produce a form for Living Wills, now called Advance Directives. It was a phenomenal occurrence because of the collaborative nature. Today, countless families, as well as hospitals, physicians, attorneys and long-term care facilities, have benefited from the seeds Mary Beth and her colleagues planted long ago at the Center for Practical Bioethics. Mary Beth's concern for patients and families, along with others, has resulted in significant advances in the end of life confluence of law and medicine. For her vision and foresight in this emotionally difficult area, we can all be thankful.

Mary Beth has always been a creative thinker and a problem-solver. After refining her health care legal skills at the hospital, she went on to practice at two other firms before joining Polsinelli in 2003. We knew Mary Beth and actively sought her out to lead our firm's then small, but growing Health Care Practice. When she began in health care law in the late 1970's, the field, while regulated, was not nearly as complex as it is today. With 17% of GDP devoted to Health Care, the regulatory and policy issues have expanded geometrically, not only because of the Affordable Care Act but it has added to the complexity and uncertainty health care providers and payers face, which makes the field a lawyer's dream. When Mary Beth joined our firm, we had a handful of health care attorneys in Kansas City and St. Louis. Her leadership and vision acted as a catalyst for a Health Care Group that now includes 100 attorneys in a dozen offices across the country from Washington, D.C. to Los Angeles. While Mary Beth is no longer the chair, she remains active as a senior partner and committed to the firm's clients, who are large health care providers including the same hospital that hired her originally.

Although she would be reticent to take credit for this, Mary Beth is also a trailblazer for women attorneys. She created and led the firm's Women's Initiative dedicated to recruiting, retaining and

promoting the careers of women through leadership, business development training, marketing and cultivation of internal mentoring relationships. Mary Beth is always open and supportive of women attorneys and has helped them realize that you can have a quality family life and a successful law practice. I should add that many well-trained male attorneys learned how to practice law under Mary Beth's guidance. Mary Beth and her husband Mike raised two very accomplished daughters, one of whom is an attorney and the other is a Foreign Service officer. Mary Beth's accomplishments have been acknowledged by others through the recognition and awards she has received in both the health and legal industries, along with inclusion in *The Best Lawyers in America*, *Health Care* consistently since 1993, *Missouri and Kansas Super Lawyers* since 2005, "Best of the Bar" by the *Kansas City Business Journal* and the Outstanding Service Award presented by the Kansas Bar Association. In addition to her legal accomplishments, Mary Beth has also been recognized for her contributions to numerous civic and charitable organizations including the Center For Practice Bioethics Vision to Action Award, as President of the Shawnee Mission Education Foundation and the Wellesley College Alumnae Board. Her lifelong commitment to her clients, her passion for health care and her moral compass that leads her to always do what is right makes me proud to call her my friend, partner and colleague. All of her friends and colleagues at Polsinelli congratulate Mary Beth on this well-deserved honor.

Mary Beth, you have helped make Kansas City a better place to live and have contributed significantly to our firm's success. Thank you for your quiet, effective leadership and your personal commitment to the values you hold so dear.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Russ Welsh has been the chairman of Polsinelli since 1998. He's been proud to call Mary Beth Blake a friend and partner for more than 20 years.

MICHELLE STARK KAUFMAN: BARON OF THE BOARDROOM

Michelle Stark Kaufman is one of the finest lawyers I've ever known – and one of the very finest people, too.

Michelle's remarkable legal career began at Stinson Mag & Fizzell (now Stinson Leonard Street) where she spent 12 years, and for the past 19 years she has been a partner at Dentons LLP (formerly Sonnenschein Nath & Rosenthal and SNR Denton). From Fort Dodge, Iowa, Michelle is the third generation of lawyers in her family. Her maternal grandfather began practicing law in 1918, and her father was a tax lawyer for more than 50 years. Initially, though, Michelle's career choice was art. There probably aren't a lot of lawyers who are art



majors, perhaps for good reason! Michelle suggests it's not exactly the best background for law school, but drawing and painting at Iowa State University (where she received her undergraduate degree with honors) somehow prepared her for law school at the University of Missouri – Kansas City, where she graduated with distinction.

Michelle has been recognized by the Kansas City Business Journal as one of the "25 Most Influential Women in Kansas City Business," receiving that publication's "Women Who Mean Business" award. She has been selected in multiple years as one of the "Best Lawyers in America" and a "Missouri/Kansas SuperLawyer." In 2007, Michelle was named by

Nightingale Healthcare News as one of the ten outstanding physician practice lawyers in the entire country.

All of these accolades are well deserved, but they don't begin to tell the whole story about Michelle as a lawyer. A few of her extraordinary qualities: brilliant, meticulously thorough, practical, knowledgeable, experienced, client-oriented, totally reliable and results-oriented. Above all, Michelle values honesty and is perhaps the closest observer of legal ethics I know. Michelle also has a remarkable way of making clients like her as well as respect her, even when she sometimes has to deliver legal news that's not exactly what the client wants to hear. In almost thirty years of working closely with Michelle, I have heard client after client sing her praises and applaud her performance. And never – not even once – did I hear a negative comment from a client. Michelle's clients have only praise and thanks for a job done extraordinarily well.

Here's what one of Michelle's Dentons partners recently reported to Dentons' managing committee about Michelle:

I routinely (and I mean weekly) receive calls from various folks who rave about Michelle. The [in-house counsel] tells me repeatedly, "Well, it happened again. I was in some meeting with a room full of [client's management personnel] from all over and someone mentions Michelle Stark Kaufman and the whole room erupts with "we just love her, she's fabulous, so knowledgeable and practical ..." and on and on and on.

That sums up perfectly Michelle's extraordinary abilities as a lawyer.

As a law firm colleague and partner, Michelle is without peer. She is a partner who never – I repeat, never – puts her own interest ahead of her colleagues or her firm. She's willing to pitch in and help on any matter – whether for a client or for the firm – no matter how challenging or difficult. Michelle is one of those exceptional partners – we all know a few of them; there just aren't enough of them – who provide the glue to make a practice group, an office and even a law firm work.

But Michelle Stark Kaufman is so much more than a great lawyer and a great partner. She has been, and continues to be, active in

a host of civic and community endeavors. For example, she serves on the executive committee of Kansas City Hospice, the largest hospice in the Kansas City community. She's a past president of the Law Foundation of UMKC and the Kansas City Tomorrow Alumni Association. She is an officer and director of the City of Fountains Foundation. She has served as a UMKC Trustee and as president of the UMKC Law Alumni Association and notably (particularly for me!) she has been

an active member of the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce, was the first woman to become chair of the Chamber's Membership Committee, the first woman to chair the Chairman's Club and was inducted into the Chairman's Club Hall of Fame.

Michelle is happily married to Dan Kaufman and she readily would tell you that the lights of their lives are their three children: Jane, David and Carolyn. From personal experience, I know that parenting in a two-career family is a challenge and

Dentons proudly congratulates

Michelle Stark Kaufman



On her recognition as a
Baron of the Boardroom
by the
Kansas City Metropolitan
Bar Association

We applaud Michelle's accomplishments
and the commitment to service she provides
to her clients.

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Michelle credits Dan for his great support at every step. According to her, "he has done more than his share at home." Michelle, characteristically, is too modest, of course. It takes a special person to accomplish career success while maintaining a happy marriage and launching three well-adjusted children successfully in the world, as Jane, David and Carolyn would attest.

To sum up, I conclude where I began: Michelle Stark Kaufman is one of the finest lawyers I've ever known – and one of the very finest people. She has earned recognition as KCMBA's Baron of the Boardroom Award because she is a remarkable example of how to achieve exceptional professional success, play an active and meaningful role in our community and enjoy a wonderful

family life. Michelle Stark Kaufman is a most worthy Baron of the Boardroom. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



Jim Heeler practiced corporate law and health care in Kansas City for 35 years before becoming President and CEO of the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce, his current position. He practiced law with Michelle Stark Kauffman at Stinson Mag & Fizzell (now Slinson Leonard Street) and at Sonnenschein Nath & Rosenthal (now Dentons).

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