

Allen keeps mother in mind while building career



When Shannon Allen meets with clients, she said, she keeps in mind that they often are facing the greatest crises of their lives.

Perhaps it's because of the years she has spent as a successful litigator, or maybe it's the personal adversity she faced as a young adult, but as an attorney, Allen said, she prides herself on helping her clients do more than just navigate the complex legal system.

"I believe I am extremely compassionate," the Fox, O'Neill & Shannon SC shareholder said, "and able to listen, identify and understand the ways in which my clients' legal matters affect their lives."

Allen said she dreamed of becoming an attorney since she was in grade school because she wanted to help people. Getting there, however, was not easy.

Allen's father abandoned her family in 1977, leaving her mother to raise three children, including Allen's older brother, Timothy, who has special needs, she said. Allen's mother owned a cleaning business and often struggled to put food on the table, Allen said.

In 1991, Allen's mother died from breast cancer at age 54. Allen, who was a senior in college, became the legal guardian of Timothy and her 16-year-old brother and remains Timothy's primary caretaker and financial provider, she said.

"My mom taught by example to work hard and provide for your family," Allen said. "Doors are often shut to those who do not pursue higher education. I learned at an early age how vital higher education is to assisting you in obtaining your goals."

Allen shares her belief in education with young people through the Charles N. Clevert Jr. Mentoring Program, which pairs attorneys and students during the school year.

Allen's procedural litigation expertise and her position as director of the Milwaukee Bar Association also has made her a role model for younger female attorneys and garnered the admiration of her colleagues.

"She has an innate ability to identify the real problems in a case and see things clearly from the client's perspective," said Matthew O'Neill, who has practiced with Allen for 15 years and run more than 2,500 miles with her. "She never stops thinking about her clients and how to best solve their legal issues. Even on mile 19."

It is an approach to life, Allen said, that she learned from her mother.

"I experienced firsthand that life is short with the untimely death of my mother," she said. "This perspective has allowed me to live each day to the fullest both professionally and personally."

— Corrine Hess