



Michelle Kohut joined the prestigious Chicago law firm Corboy & Demetrio as an attorney in 2004.

» ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

The networking path of a Rambler

An intricate web of Loyola connections helps an alum land her dream job

By **Michelle M. Kohut** (BA '96, JD '02)

When I chose to attend Loyola University Chicago for my undergraduate studies, I was the first in my family to leave home and attend college, and the first and only one to graduate.

I knew Loyola was my best chance at success; it was far enough away from home to provide me with a “true” college experience, yet close enough that I could board the train and be home in Milwaukee in two hours. I arrived at Loyola and in Chicago not knowing anyone. Because of the community of students, faculty, and staff and the size of the campus I felt immediately welcomed.

I was a criminal justice major, so most of my classes were held at Loyola's Water Tower Campus. I enjoyed attending class surrounded by the hustle and bustle—that, in itself, was educational. I had many great professors, but two who really stood out were Magnus Seng, PhD, and David Struckhoff, PhD, of the Department of Criminal Justice. They opened my eyes to our system of justice and the impact it has on our society.

I could not afford to travel abroad. Instead, I spent the spring semester of my junior year at Catholic University in Washington, DC, and interned with the public affairs department of the United States Department of Justice. The internship was a tremendous experience.

I graduated in 1996, unsure of what I wanted to do with my degree. Because of cost, I could not commit to law school at that point. Instead, for a year I juggled two jobs without benefits and was neither challenged nor satisfied. Then, Loyola started a paralegal program, and I eagerly applied.

First steps into the legal field

When I earned a certificate in paralegal studies a year later, I blindly sent résumés out to about 100 law firms and got nowhere. Then I did something that was uncharacteristic of me at the time. I reached out to the director of Loyola's Institute for Paralegal Studies, Jean Hellman Ryan, and asked for help. It just so happened that Professor Hellman Ryan (BA '74, LLM '95) had gone to law school with Kevin Conway (BA '73, JD '76) of Cooney & Conway. She was kind enough to reach out to Kevin, whose colleague, Kathy Byrne (JD '88; see page 34), was in need of a legal assistant. I met with Kathy and was hired—not only because she liked me but also because she liked

that I'd interned for Janet Reno at the Department of Justice. I worked as her assistant for two years before being promoted to managing paralegal of the firm's intake department.

It was around this time that one of the partners asked me if I had considered attending law school. I gave this some thought, and knew I wanted to be a plaintiff's personal injury attorney after seeing the injustice and inhumanity that the victims of asbestos exposure experience. I took the LSAT, enrolled in Loyola's part-time evening program, and continued to work full time. I was fortunate to attend the London Comparative Advocacy Program over Christmas break with Associate Dean Jim Fought, Professor Dick Michael, and others. It was an enlightening program and a fun time of year to be in London.

While at Cooney & Conway, I met many of the attorneys who were friends of the firm. Two such attorneys were Al Schwartz and Steve Jambos of Kralovec Jambos & Schwartz. This firm had been started by the Hon. William D. Maddux, the recently retired presiding judge of the Law Division of the Circuit Court of Cook County. I became friends with Al and Steve

and occasionally socialized with them. Shortly before graduation, I asked Judge Maddux for his advice about approaching Kevin and John Cooney about hiring me as an associate; however, before I could even have that conversation with them, they had already hired someone.

On to “Corboy College”

Timing is everything, and my timing was perfect, because Judge Maddux needed a law clerk. I spent the first two and a half years of my law career as his clerk, and I consider myself fortunate to have had that opportunity. I had—and continue to have—a great mentor. Judge Maddux was always thoughtful and would introduce me to potential employers. One night I met Shawn Kasserman, a former partner at Corboy & Demetrio, who invited me to drop off my résumé. Again, the timing was perfect, and before I knew it, I was enrolled in the “Corboy College” as a young associate at Corboy & Demetrio.

I never in my wildest dreams thought I would work at such a legendary firm. I didn't grow up in Chicago well connected, but because of the connections I made, I had the privilege to work under the late, great Philip Corboy (JD '49) and with many of the other remarkable trial lawyers who have worked there and continue to work there.

It is hard to believe that it has been 12 years since I graduated from Loyola's School of Law and become one of the proud few who can call herself a triple Rambler. Graduating from Loyola was just the beginning of each chapter of my success, and this is my greatest chapter yet. Thus far in the course of my young career I have had the opportunity to try 16 cases to verdict and ascend to the presidency of the Women's Bar Association of Illinois. These accomplishments are a true testament to Corboy & Demetrio's mentoring of trial lawyers and leaders in this profession as well as to the great educators at the Philip H. Corboy Law Center. I know Mr. Corboy would be proud. ■

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