

4 of 122 DOCUMENTS

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HEADLINE: Good deeds don't go unnoticed for N.H. lawyer

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BODY:

MANCHESTER, N.H. — A few afternoons each week, Mary Ann Dempsey can be found sitting in her office at the Wiggin & Nourie law firm wearing gym shorts, a T-shirt, battered sneakers and her hair pulled back in a ponytail.

Not normal dress for an up-and-coming lawyer, but typical for Dempsey, who spends several afternoons each week coaching the St. Joseph Regional Junior High School track team in Manchester and then returns to the office to finish her work.

Dempsey also volunteers at Manchester's New Horizons Soup Kitchen and sits on the Advisory Board for Child and Family Services in Nashua, helping to raise money so underprivileged children can attend summer camp each year.

In the courtroom, Dempsey handles mostly civil work, such as insurance cases and product liability. She was part of the group that sued Microsoft in an anti-trust lawsuit. She does her share of pro-bono marital cases focusing on custody and child support.

While Dempsey, a Lowell native who grew up in Dracut, doesn't broadcast her own legal skill and good deeds, others have taken notice.

Dempsey, 33, will be recognized on May 11 for her work by receiving this year's prestigious New Hampshire Board Foundation's Robert E. Kirby Award, established in 1996 in honor of a young lawyer who showed "great skill, civility and good humor." Kirby died at age 35.

Dempsey, of Merrimack, was nominated for the award by New Hampshire Supreme Court Justice Gary Hicks, her former boss, and unanimously selected by a panel of judges.

"She's great," Hicks said. Dempsey has "earned the respect of everyone in the bar," he added.

Dempsey said she was really surprised and humbled by the award.

"It's just so nice," she said. "I look at what this award stands for and think it is not so much an accomplishment, but something I strive for."

Dempsey credits her parents for instilling in her a sense of community service and a love of learning.

Her father, Robert Dempsey, worked in the Lowell schools for 25 years before becoming the assistant superintendent of North Middlesex Regional School District in Townsend, and her mother, Mary Ann Dempsey, is a nursing supervisor.

With a father who worked for the schools and a mother who was a nurse, Dempsey said she and her four siblings always went to school.

"I couldn't get away with anything," Dempsey jokes.

But it paid off.

She earned her bachelor's degree from Clark University in Worcester and received her law degree from Boston

College Law School.

Dempsey cut her teeth with Lowell's Committee for Public Counsel Services, the public defenders, working in Lowell District Court doing bail hearings. Then she did a clerkship in New Hampshire and worked on civil cases.

Seven years ago, she opted for a job with Wiggin & Nourie because it would pay the bills, the work was challenging, and the law firm has been flexible in understanding her extracurricular good deeds.

While the future may hold a teaching position for Dempsey, she said her job and her other activities provide her with enough challenges right now.

"I really like what I'm doing," she said.

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