

UP CLOSE & PERSONAL

with the matrimonial and family law team of Archer & Greiner

As one of the most recognized law firms in the area, Archer & Greiner offers vast resources for a wide range of legal matters. One of its most distinguishing features is its family law department, equipped to handle divorce, custody/parenting time, child support, college contribution, alimony, relocation, adoption and domestic violence. It also offers mediation or arbitration as an alternative to litigation.

However, it's the people within the family law department who make the difference in clients' lives, attorneys who not only have résumés full of accomplishments, but the essential human qualities that clients need during a trying time. Here are Archer's matrimonial and family law attorneys:



Stephanie J. Zane,
*Partner, Family Law
Department Chair*

Zane attended St. Joseph's University followed by Rutgers University-Camden School of Law. She was a law clerk in Camden Superior Court prior to joining Archer & Greiner nearly 20 years ago.

Zane pursued family law because she likes helping people. "Family law is an area of law in which you see an immediate impact of your attorney/client relationship. Every case is different—so being a family law attorney is never boring," she says. The emotional impact of divorce can cause challenges, which requires a special approach by an attorney. "Sometimes emotions drive the decisions that a client wants to

make or the positions they want to advance. Managing the emotions while encouraging a rational and civil decision makes it a difficult balance. ... Family law attorneys must be empathic, understanding and supportive of the needs of the client but they must also be able to manage the expectations of the client within the confines of the law."

However, she is rewarded whenever a client moves forward with a life they did not think was possible. "Family law is about forming relationships—with the client, the adversaries, the bar and the court," Zane says. "Your success as a family lawyer is based upon your reputation and it is essential to set the foundation for your career early."



Jennie A. Owens, *Partner*

Having witnessed her own parents' divorce as a young child, Owens saw the need for empathetic attorneys who could appreciate the stress it creates on the entire family, including children. She pursued a career in law, graduating from Rutgers University School of Law in 2006. Owens has been with Archer for almost 13 years and, along with practicing all types of family law, she also handles adoptions and appeals.

Her experience has shown her she needs to be able to tackle anything that comes her way. "Often, emergencies arise in family law that require immediate attention. Being able to pivot and put out fires, while continuing to meet time constraints can be a challenge," she says. "Helping people through a very difficult time and helping them meet their goals is the most rewarding aspect of this job. So often, in an initial meeting, a client is concerned about how they will survive following the divorce. Seeing them thrive at the end is very rewarding."

Nothing beats adoptions, though, Owens says. "Adoptions are my favorite part of this job. Seeing the joy on the parents' and the child's face when they are finally recognized as a family is the most rewarding moment."

Owens says Archer has given her the ability to have a work/life balance, particularly during the pandemic. "It is a supportive environment that allows me to meet the needs of my children, my family and my clients. I also work with a group of smart, professional and talented attorneys. The ability to collaborate with the other members of our department makes me a better lawyer."

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Drew Burach, Partner

Burach has been an attorney since 2004 after graduating from Rutgers Law School. He served as a judicial law clerk prior to joining Archer in 2005, and has remained there since. Now a partner, Burach focuses on all areas of family law, from alimony and college contribution to distribution of assets and liabilities.

"I was drawn to family law very early on in law school by the distinctiveness of the practice as it touches on so many areas of the law—tax, real estate, municipal, criminal, bankruptcy, appellate work, etc.," he says. "I was further intrigued by the opportunity to advocate on behalf of clients in so many different forums—mediations, arbitrations, motions and trials, all of which are a regular part of my practice."

Burach recognizes how dramatically an individual's life can change with divorce, and works with clients to navigate those circumstances to produce as positive an outcome as possible. Being a part of Archer contributes to those outcomes, he says.

"Working at the Family and Matrimonial Law Department at Archer is often like being a part of a think tank. We brainstorm, bounce ideas, talk and formulate creative solutions—all to meet our client's goals and objectives. This energy is a major benefit of being a client of Archer."

Marie E. Lihotz, Of Counsel

Lihotz served more than 20 years with New Jersey's judiciary. Prior to that, her firm represented small and family businesses, often dealing with divorces. After her time as a judge, Lihotz began working in the area of alternative dispute resolution, aiding parties as a neutral in arbitrations and mediations. "Working as a neutral, I try to get each party to be collaborative—to calmly consider the best alternative to resolving their disagreements without spending the time and emotion associated with litigation. That way each person finds satisfaction in accepting the result," she says.

As a mediator, Lihotz says the most important skills are listening, understanding each party's objectives and then rationally assessing each objective to find the best course of action. "This requires knowledge of the law, a practical view of reaching a goal, firmly evaluating unrealistic expectations, patience to work through each issue and understanding that the mediator and counsel can address immediate needs."

Lihotz is surrounded by amazing people at Archer who are knowledgeable, sensitive and practical. "The firm has specialists to handle related issues regarding wills, tax concerns or real estate sales. Collectively we strive to provide our clients with dependable overall service addressing all their legal needs," she says.



Tara L. Hanna, Associate

Hanna attended American University where she obtained her bachelor's in political science and literature. She then received her law degree from Rutgers University School of Law. Hanna says family law is a good fit for her because it allows her to work with clients on an emotional level as they transition through a

difficult part of their lives. "I love having a job where I interact with people on a daily basis and can establish a close relationship with my clients," she says. But the job is not without its challenges, she adds, especially in regard to clients' children.

Hanna says the most important qualities that a family law attorney should possess include empathy, patience, creativity and the ability to communicate effectively. "Helping clients see the light at the end of the tunnel and playing a part in their new beginning is the most rewarding aspect of my job," she says.

Professionally, Hanna loves the collaborative culture of Archer. "I feel confident providing my clients with comprehensive advice when other types of law may interact with their matter because I can consult with experts in almost every other legal field." To young women who may soon be entering the field of family law, Hanna advises, "Observe as many other experienced family law practitioners as you [can] to learn different styles of practice and figure out what works best for you."



William J. Thompson, Partner

Thompson has spent the whole of his four-decade career at Archer. He clerked at the firm while attending the University of Pennsylvania School of Law and accepted a position upon graduation. He has served as department chair, co-chair of the Camden County Bar Association Family Law Committee and president of the Thomas S. Forkin Family Law Inn of Court, among others. He has extensive experience in all aspects of family law and is a trained mediator.

"I was drawn to family law as I had experienced the difficulties of divorce as a young adult through the divorce of my parents. My focus and goal in every case is to find the least combative manner of reaching an amicable resolution which works for all sides. ... Success requires patience, compassion and a willingness to bond with the client in a meaningful and sincere way," he says.

Thompson is proud of the work he's done with Archer and the relationships he has built with colleagues. "I have had the privilege of working with highly skilled professionals who share a sense of family. We care as much about each other as we do our clients." ♦