



Counselor-in-Chief

Rebekah Steely Brooker prepares to lead the Texas Young Lawyers Association.

BY LINDSAY STAFFORD MADER

WALKING AROUND THE OFFICES OF SCHEEF & STONE, WHICH TAKE UP THE ENTIRE 27TH FLOOR OF ROSS TOWER IN DOWNTOWN DALLAS, Rebekah Steely Brooker smiles and says hello to each person she passes, though she doesn't yet know all of their faces. It is her second week as a member at the firm, and she is not used to being the new person. Brooker spent the first decade of her career as an attorney with Passman & Jones in Dallas, where she practiced probate and estate planning and administration. When an offer recently arose for her to move to Scheef & Stone, which has a diversity of practice areas and approximately 47 attorneys, Brooker said that such a change was intimidating at first. But being the sort of person who embraces a good challenge, especially one that will further her career and benefit her clients, she seized the opportunity. And it likely won't be long until everyone at Scheef & Stone will come to know and like Brooker, whose calm and down-to-earth disposition is immediately welcoming.

"Working with Rebekah is ... more like sharing experiences with a kindred spirit equally dedicated to finding the right solution to a problem," said Greg Sampson, a member in Gray Reed & McGraw who practiced with Brooker at Passman & Jones. "Rebekah's strong characteristics include listening well, innovative problem-solving, respect for and careful study of tradition, integrity, enthusiasm, reliability, and trustworthiness. All of this is wrapped with a cooperative spirit and a good humor that makes work with her a joy."

Brooker's specialty area of probate, trust, and estate law is sometimes called morbid; she deals with death, after all. But her ability to provide sincere comfort while having a philosophy of positivity and a contagious laugh helps bring light to a dark moment in many people's lives. "There's a reason why they call us counselors," said Brooker. "One of the things I try to do is really listen. A lot of times they just want to be heard."

Partly due to experiences practicing in this field, Brooker has a deep interest in helping senior citizens. This led to her first project with the Texas Young Lawyers Association, serving as a co-creator and co-author of the informational brochure *Dealing with Dementia*. Not long after that, Brooker created the *Texas Probate Passport* and then served as TYLA treasurer, director, and executive adviser to the organization's Low Income Texans and Community Education committees. And, beginning on June 27, 2014, Brooker will lead TYLA as its new president.

OPPOSITE: Rebekah Steely Brooker holding daughter, Tess (1), with sons, Mac (4) and Hutch (6), at her side.

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Rebekah Steely Brooker with her husband, Chip Brooker, sons, Mac and Hutch, and daughter, Tess.

"The opportunity to go out and to tell the state of Texas, and beyond, what we're doing here for our young lawyers and for our community—it's an awesome responsibility," she said. "We're blessed to have the ability to help people with the knowledge that we have. We have to give it back, or at least that's how I was raised. I want TYLA to be known as a good organization with good people."

Growing up near Huntsville in between the small towns of Phelps and New Waverly, Brooker participated in almost every school sport, including basketball, cross country, track, and even swimming. Her mom, who is East Indian and Dutch, immigrated to the United States from Trinidad as a teenager, while her father—a native Texan grew up around Conroe. Her parents met in high school and soon wed. Brooker's mom studied theater directing in college, though she eventually quit to raise her four kids and work full time. When the marriage ended, Brooker and her three siblings remained in Huntsville with their mother, who, Brooker said, is her biggest inspiration. "She raised us pretty much on her own. She was always encouraging, never complained, and was very selfless. Her parents moved to America to better the family, and she wanted to make sure we were in an even better condition than what she grew up with."

While attending a high school government leadership conference in Washington, D.C., Brooker met her husband, Chip Brooker, who grew up in South Carolina. They quickly became great friends and stayed in touch via dialup Internet and snail mail. Brooker went on to attend Texas A&M University, starting out in engineering, which she recalls as requiring "a lot more math and science than I was prepared to give!" After dabbling in accounting, she decided on business management with a focus on international business, which led to one of the best experiences of her life—a self-planned study abroad trip to Costa Rica to work for the American Flower Corp., a floral export company. While abroad, Brooker also learned about Shakira ("before she was cool") and Maná and the locals' attitude that todo es possible.

When Brooker graduated from A&M, she joined her older sister in becoming the first generation of their family to receive a college degree. Then she moved to Dallas and spent a year working before marrying Chip one month before the two started their first year at Southern Methodist University Dedman School of Law. Now, 13 years later, they have two busy careers and three children, who keep life entertaining between school, church, T-ball, soccer, and karate.

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"I truly have a great partner," Brooker said of her husband, who is a trial lawyer with the Law Offices of Frank L. Branson in Dallas. "I am beyond blessed with him. He is very much, to me, the kind of father I had always hoped my children would have. And he's not here right now because he's in trial, which makes the juggle harder, but we make it work. We both love what we're doing; we're passionate about our work."

Like many new lawyers, Brooker also was a litigator at the start of her career. Then her grandfather died, and her grandmother called to get help with his estate. Brooker didn't have much experience with that area of law, so she asked Sampson to fill her in on the basics. "Rebekah approached her transition to the probate, trusts, and estates practice like she does everything else—with a commitment and persistence to learn all it takes to do it well. Because she is self-motivated and a keen observer who is unafraid to ask questions, she quickly adapts to varied situations and does so with a characteristic quiet confidence and professionalism that make her mentors eager to help her grow in her practice."

Brooker says assisting her grandmother was a pivotal moment in her life, one at which she realized what she was truly meant to do. "I think it was just seeing how scared Granny was and how much I helped her. She was so appreciative of it. For me, it was a breath of fresh air because I had been doing litigation where people are always at odds."

Brooker's connection to helping her clients has continued to be a mainstay of her career. For many of her clients, Brooker is the first attorney they have ever retained. Even after their engagements, many of her clients regularly stay in touch with Brooker by sending cards, pictures, and messages thanking her and keeping her updated on their families. Some clients think so highly of Brooker that they send magazine clippings for her children's scrapbooks and ask to see family photos. Brooker also serves as an ad litem attorney for mentally challenged individuals, which she said is the most rewarding aspect of her legal work—"to be a voice for the voiceless."

Serving as TYLA president is another opportunity for Brooker to help support the public and the community of young lawyers. In the months since being announced as the organization's 2013-2014 president-elect, she has been brainstorming what service projects and resources she wants to focus on. Among several initiatives, Brooker hopes to address distracted driving and bullying. She'd also like TYLA to create a blog addressing all aspects of worklife balance, which she says can cause some lawyers to leave the profession.

"You want to do a good job practicing law, but you want to be a good mother, father, son, daughter—whatever. That juggle is hard," she said. "Oh my goodness, I juggle lots of balls. I drop many of them. You have to pick them back up and keep juggling. But I think a lot of people are fearful of how is it going to work?"

With the less-than-ideal job market for new and young lawyers, Brooker knows that she and TYLA need to continue addressing the situation, which she plans to do by encouraging a program that would place law students with clerkships across the state. "I'm always hopeful that things will improve," said Brooker. "And I think we've seen improvement over the last several years and it might not happen fast, but change doesn't have to happen quickly. If you want to go to law school then go. Find what you're passionate about and do that."

Those who know and have worked with Brooker have no doubt she will excel at her upcoming leadership position. "I haven't seen someone better poised to tackle challenges facing young lawyers in years," said Gindi Vincent, counsel to Exxon Mobil Corp. and a former chair of the TYLA board. "First of all, Rebekah is tremendously good. She has a good heart and a passion for improving others' lives, which is what I believe TYLA has stood for all these years. Second, Rebekah has strategic vision. She not only sees what she wants to accomplish but she builds effective teams and then goes beyond what anyone envisioned could be done." TBJ

PUBLIC NOTICE

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS GALVESTON DIVISION

REAPPOINTMENT OF INCUMBENT MAGISTRATE JUDGE JOHN R. FROESCHNER

The current term of the office of United States Magistrate Judge John R. Froeschner at Galveston, Texas, is due to expire February 24, 2015. The United States District Court is required by law to establish a panel of citizens to consider the reappointment of Magistrate Judge John R. Froeschner to a new 8 year term.

The duties of a Magistrate Judge position include the following:

- 1. Conducting most preliminary proceedings in criminal cases;
- 2. Trial and disposition of misdemeanor cases;
- Conducting various pretrial matters and evidentiary proceedings on delegation from the judges of the district court; and,
- 4. Trial and disposition of civil cases upon consent of the litigants.

The court invites comments from members of the bar and the public as to whether the panel should recommend the reappointment of Magistrate Judge John R. Froeschner to the court. Direct comments to: John R. Froeschner Reappointment Panel; Attention: David J. Bradley, U. S. District Clerk, (under confidential cover), P.O. Box 61010, Houston, Texas 77208.

Comments must be received no later than July 25, 2014, 5:00 p.m.