

INSIDE

BUSINESS JOURNAL

January - February



GENERATION X

THE FALLACY OF STEREOTYPE THE EMERGENCE OF LEADERSHIP

It was a generation once classified as synonymous with slacker.

Meet the real life Generation X'ers who defy stereotype and surpass expectation.

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 4

KERRISA CHELKOWSKI

CRIMINAL DEFENSE **LAWYER**

THE LAW OFFICE OF KERRISA CHELKOWSKI

Age 30

“Challenge and question everything... What? Why? And How?”

Her greatest strength may be in her ability to handle unanticipated situations with both a sense of compassion and composure. “I was always very shy,” she says. “But I traveled a lot growing up, which forced me to step out of my comfort zone.”

Kerrisa traveled to various destinations as the daughter to a father in the Air Force. After several years in Europe, the family returned to the United States to Virginia, where Kerrisa attended high school. When it was finally time to decide on a college, Kerrisa wanted to move to Texas. Her father's native home was San Antonio. She attended the University of Texas at Austin receiving her teacher's certification, and then went into Texas Tech Law School. “My parents encouraged me to pursue law school,” she says. “It was a marketable degree and I felt it was the right choice.”

Today, Criminal Defense Lawyer, Kerrisa Chelkowski, says what draws her most to her work are the day-to-day challenges she encounters and perseveres to overcome. “Everyday is different,” she says. She often faces the stigma associated with the presumed guilt of her clients. However, she battles the fallacy that the public assumes guilt without recognizing the innocent. “The people I see are essentially good people. They're human beings and there are real stories behind their circumstances,” she explains.

Kerrisa began her law career working for the Bexar County District Attorney's office immediately after passing the bar exam in spring of 2002. They say timing is everything, as it proved for Kerrisa when a position in the Appellate Division opened just as she was seeking employment. “The Chief of the Appellate Division, Alan Battaglia, took a chance on me, and I am thankful for that everyday,” she says. While in the Appellate Division, Kerrisa was involved in capital cases. wrote

numerous briefs and participated in oral arguments, including one before the Court of Criminal Appeals. She'd only been out of law school a year when she began working on a large case concerning issues in DWI cases and was instructed to take leadership in the case. “It broadened the learning curve in my career,” she says.

After working in the DA's office for two years in both the appellate and trial division, she decided it was time to move into

private practice. “I wanted new challenges, new experiences,” she explains. Initially, she faced much opposition. However, she credits a successful transition to family who have supported her in every aspect of her life and a list of professional mentors who were very encouraging of her goals. Friend and fellow colleague, Robert Valdez gave Kerrisa her start after she left the DAS office as he welcomed her into his office. She was fortunate to try many cases alongside him. Criminal Defense Lawyer Neil Calfas taught her the processes involved in criminal defense work. And District Attorney Tony Hackebiel continues to challenge Kerrisa by allowing her the opportunity to stay sharp on both sides of the law as a Special Prosecutor in Medina County.

“These are my mentors,” she proudly boasts.

Kerrisa speaks passionately about her career. She concedes the great component in law is the ability to indulge in its many layers. “You can practice in any area you want,” she acknowledges. However, she advises individuals to investigate (the “what's,” the “why's” and the “how's”) regarding one's own interest while remaining open and flexible towards perhaps unanticipated opportunities. “Because I took a chance on something different, I now see the world through a different lens and am hopefully making a positive difference in the lives of others,” she says. □

