

Veteran litigation attorney serves as first female president of GableGotwals

By Paula Burkes
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Veteran Oklahoma City litigation attorney Amy Stipe was back at work only two months after maternity leave with her youngest child when she — seven years ago — was named to the all-male, eight-member board of GableGotwals. Today, Stipe is serving the Tulsa-based firm — which represents energy, banks and other corporations — as its first female president.

“I think that shows you the mindset of my firm,” said Stipe, who’s worked for GableGotwals her entire 21-year career.

“I’m raising three beautiful children, helping to lead a law firm of about 100 attorneys and providing a good service to my clients at work — all of which is very satisfying to me in different ways,” she said.

From her 15th-floor offices in Leadership Square, Stipe, 46, sat down with The Oklahoman on Monday to talk about her career and life, including the home-made Halloween costumes she makes for family every year. The following is an edited transcript:

What was your first job?
I started working at 15 to help pay for the things I needed, including clothes and gas and insurance for my first car — a Mazda GLC with windows tinted purple. I took a dishwasher job at Crockett’s Smokehouse for \$3.50 an hour. What I remember is that no amount of shampooing would take the smoke out of my hair; I constantly smelled like brisket. Later, I worked as a cashier at Buy for Less and at Foley’s department store. During college at OU, I worked as a front desk manager for the Marriott Hotel on Northwest Expressway and often pulled back-to-back 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. and graveyard shifts. As a night manager, I had oversight of Russell’s bar, but wasn’t old enough to go in, much less bounce guys three times bigger than I was. After graduating OU, I took a year off to help raise money for law school and worked for a finance company, deciding the interest that car buyers would pay for loans, based on their credit and employment histories.

Why’d you decide to become a lawyer?
I long debated whether to pursue a doctorate in psychology, which was my undergraduate degree at OU, or go to law school. In the end, I opted for law school because I could better put my

writing skills to work.

Why’d you choose to join GableGotwals?
During law school, I’d clerked for Hall Estill, Fellers Snider, the now defunct McKinney & Stringer and GableGotwals my last year. I chose to join Tulsa-based GableGotwals because it’s a big firm with lots of clients and perks. But at the time, there were only six employees in its Oklahoma City office. I figured I’d get to do more — and I did. Within a few years, I was working on jury trials as the second chair versus the ninth chair. I’ve had great mentors who inspired me to provide the absolute best service to our clients and to serve the firm in a leadership role.

Don’t most cases settle versus go to trial these days?
Yes, 95% of cases settle. I recently had a groundwater pollution case, where the energy company and residents of a neighborhood settled on midnight Friday



Amy Stipe, the first female president of GableGotwals, talks about juggling law and motherhood. [NATE BILLINGS/THE OKLAHOMAN]

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— before trial on Monday. The jury was picked, and we spent seven years on the case. Of course, settling usually is best for all parties. Still, part of me wanted to go to trial; it’s sort of like not being able to read the last page of a book you long to finish.

What’s your typical weekday look like?

Mornings are controlled chaos; all hands on deck. I wake at 6, make breakfast and lunches for my kids and get myself ready for work and then ready for school. My husband, Jack, and I put the kids on the school bus at 10 ‘til 8 and then head to our respective offices. Until 4:45 p.m., I draft legal briefs, answer discovery requests ... prepare for an oral argument on a motion. As president, about 40% of my time is spent on administrative duties, including daily conversations with our human resources and finance directors. I’m in Tulsa every other

week. When I arrive home each night, I make dinner for the family; do homework, bathe, read and pray with the kids; and then respond to emails and other work, while watching “This is Us” and other favorite programs. It’s 11 p.m. before I really relax.

What’s your secret to work-life balance?

I’m meticulous with calendaring. I also keep a sense of humor. There are times when I’ve been in a business meeting and noticed some baby food on my suit jacket. You just have to laugh at these things and realize that the people around you have probably been there, too. There are tough days when nothing on your “to do” list gets done because of unforeseen circumstances with your kids or job. But nobody said balancing marriage, family and work would be easy. But anybody who’s done it, knows how rewarding it can be. Of course, it helps that I

PERSONALLY SPEAKING

Position: GableGotwals director and president

Age: 46

Graduated high school from: Putnam City West High School. She was editor of her school newspaper.

Education: University of Oklahoma, law degree and bachelor’s in psychology

Spouse: Jack, a personal injury attorney. They met their first day of law school at OU and married in 2000.

Children: sons Jackson, 10, and Holden, 6; and daughter Lane, 7

Neighborhood: Oakdale Meadows

Pet: “Bailey,” a boxer-Labrador rescue

Family of origin: Her parents divorced when she was 3; she has three younger half-siblings. Her mother lives locally and her father lives in Virginia.

Organizations: William J. Holloway, Jr. American Inn of Court; Eugene Kurtz Conference on Natural Resources Law and Policy; Oklahoma County Bar Association; Mineral Lawyers Society of Oklahoma City American Bar Association; American Bar Foundation Fellow; Oklahoma Bar Association — Mineral Law Section Chair; and Oklahoma Bar Foundation Fellow

Worship: Life Church

Free time: Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts activities with the kids

work for a firm of great lawyers who understand when I need to attend a first grade Easter party in the middle of the afternoon, or take a child to a doctor’s appointment. They know I’m dedicated to my job and that I will get all of my work done. It just might be at a little different time of the day or at a different location.

And what about those Halloween costumes? What’d you make this year?

I start making our costumes in July. This year we had an arcade theme. My husband was a Pacman. I was a photo booth, flanked by a red velvet curtain. My eldest was a Nintendo Game Boy; Holden was a light-up Whack-A-Mole game; and my daughter as a toy-grabber Claw machine on coasters and surrounded by stuffed toys. Past themes include the weather, Christmas and the solar system. Being home with my kids keeps me grounded. I love rolling up my sleeves and making Lego buildings and crafts, acting silly with them at a park, reading to them all snuggled in bed. These things make me happy and warm my heart.

TRADE TALK

Business mentors sought in local effort



Paula Burkes

New Oklahoma entrepreneur mentoring program could one day rival Boston’s

Boston has nothing on Oklahoma City. I know. I lived and worked there nearly seven years before moving back home in July 2000 after MAPS revitalized our city.

OK, Boston has clam chowder, or “chowda” as the locals call it. I’ll give them that.

But hey, OKC has chicken-fried steak, not to mention genuinely friendly, hard-working folk.

“Beantown” has the Boston Marathon — which I had the privilege, um pain, of running three times. But

our Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon is gaining speed.

Boston does have one thing that we haven’t quite developed — yet. They have an entrepreneur mentoring program, in which more than 250 professionals mentor up-and-coming entrepreneurs. The program has spawned greater economic development in the Boston area and numerous new and exciting businesses.

Oklahoma’s sister program started in February — and is aggressively seeking mentors, working or retired, who are willing to team with two other professionals two to three hours every quarter to voluntarily offer a budding businessperson in our state face-to-face unbiased advice — on everything from research, business plans and marketing to hiring personnel, opening stores and more.

The Oklahoma Entrepreneur Mentoring Program (OKEMP) was founded and is administered by Creative Oklahoma, a donation-based nonprofit

that was established in 2006 to foster an innovation-based economy.

“The idea is to short-circuit some of the learning for entrepreneurs, so they’ll likely be more successful,”



Sorocco



Shimasaki

CEO of Moleculera Labs.

“Collective expertise is the best approach,” Sorocco said, noting the entrepreneurship mentorship prototype not only is working in Boston but also in many locations worldwide from St. Louis to Portugal.

“Oklahoma has no lack of entrepreneurs,” Shimasaki said. “What we lack are individual mentors who’ve been successful in business.”

Ideal mentors would have low- to no ego, Shimasaki said. “They must be good listeners versus talking too much or simply telling someone what to do,” he said.

In a pilot program for OKEMP, retired banker and banking consultant Wayne Stone teamed with Tommy Yi, president and co-founder of StarSpace46 coworking space, and CEO adviser Rod Whitson to mentor entrepreneur Rick Stiles who — in an effort to stem accidental gun deaths and injuries worldwide — developed a user-friendly biometric trigger lock for handguns.

“In a matter of a few meetings, we covered Business 101 — including the cost to manufacture the product to the price point to sell it,” Stone said. “It was a great use of my time, energy and experience to invest in

something very meaningful for our state. Stiles’ company could be our next Paycom.”

Meanwhile, Yi implored Stiles to focus on his target customers.

“Not all gun owners are his customer base,” he said. “In fact, there’ll be a segment of his owners who’ll be against his product.”



Blancett

State Rep. Melodye Blancett, D-Tulsa, and executive director of Creative Oklahoma, said, “Mentors don’t have to hold advanced degrees in IT, but rather

have significant experience in running and starting a business. Our success only is limited by the number of quality mentors we can get.”

For more information, prospective mentors can visit stateofcreativity.com/okemp, email okemp@stateofcreativity.com or call 232.5570, ext. 2.