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Features:

Gwynne Young

— Attorney of the Month

Baird Law Group

— Law Firm of the Month

Dr. Sarah Williams

— Solo Practitioner of the Month

Maxey Law Offices, P.L.L.C.

— Boutique Law Firm of the Month

Vocational Economics

— Professional Profiles

PFAWL

— Association Profile





Gwynne Young

By Ben Norris

Central Florida's Attorney of the Month is a Leader in the State's Legal Community

Tampa attorney Gwynne Young became president of The Florida Bar on July 1, 2012, following a hard-fought election that began in November 2011. In the first three-way race since 1983, Young defeated a former state senator from Ft. Lauderdale and a Jacksonville attorney. She is now The Florida Bar's fifth female president, and the fifth attorney from Carlton Fields to lead the organization.

She was also the first female assistant state attorney in Hillsborough County, Florida, serving in this role from 1974 to 1977. She joined Carlton Fields in 1977. Five years later, Young became a shareholder.

"There were really two things that attracted me to the firm," Young remembers. "They put out a high quality legal product and, even in 1977, had a reputation for diversity and inclusion. The firm already had both women and minority shareholders."

She started in Carlton Fields' trial department, using the trial experience she'd gained at the State Attorney's Office. She moved into complex commercial litigation and found her skills and interests well-suited to this practice area.

Today, much of Young's work involves representing insurers in insurance coverage matters, real property litigation, probate and trust litigation, and other business disputes.

"I think it is always rewarding to handle a complex matter and get a good resolution for your client," Young said. "I find the work I do intellectually challenging and satisfying. I really appreciate the opportunity this firm has given me to work with good clients and lawyers."

Commitment to the Bar

Young's election to The Florida Bar's highest post follows decades of service to the bar and community. She has served on the Board of Governors for nine years, and chaired its program evaluation, budget, and strategic planning committees. She has also served on the legislation and executive committees. Young's bar service was recognized, and a number of colleagues and fellow board members encouraged her to seek The Florida Bar presidency.



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Ensuring sufficient and stable court system funding is a top priority for The Florida Bar, Young said. As a result of the recession, a dangerous gap exists between the courts' needs and the funding it receives to fulfill its role as the third coequal branch of Florida's government. At the same time, Florida's citizens and businesses are turning to the courts in much greater numbers. Presently, the court system budget is only .6 percent of Florida's overall state budget.

Young explained that more than \$1.1 billion in court-related revenue—including filing fees, service charges, court costs and fines—was submitted to the state last year, but the courts received only 65 percent of those funds. General revenue and other governmental entities received the rest. Action taken during the 2012 legislative session changed the funding mechanism for the state courts from being primarily based on filing fees, particularly

foreclosure filing fees, to being primarily funded by general state revenues. In the 2012-2013 state budget, the courts received no reduction in funding from the prior year but continue to need help in stabilizing funding and regaining resources lost since the current fiscal downturn began. However, the clerks of court were cut by \$30 billion for the 2012-2013 budget year. The Florida Bar worked with the clerks of court to restore those funds.

The economic downturn has also negatively impacted many Florida Bar members. To assist with career resources and firm management, the bar developed the “Lawyers Helping Lawyers” webpage last year. Young said she is committed to leading efforts to identify additional ways to help lawyers facing hard times.

To further assist members and increase competency, the bar is developing and offering additional, free online continuing education courses. More than 43,300 complimentary education programs, representing more than 116,000 hours of CLE credit, have been accessed since the launch of the complimentary education programs began in September 2010.

Young’s focus will include diversity and inclusion goals. While the bar and its affiliated groups have addressed diversity for more than a decade, these efforts will now be centralized and coordinated by a dedicated staff person. This year, the bar added a fifth objective to its strategic plan to continue efforts to encourage and promote diversity and inclusion in all aspects of the profession and the justice system.

“We need to make sure that every member of this organization has an opportunity to participate in all aspects of bar work and that the legal profession reflects Florida’s diverse population,” Young said.

This year, The Florida Bar also focused on educating the public on the state’s merit selection and retention system for appellate judges prior to the November election. Recognizing that many voters were unfamiliar with the merit system, the bar’s statewide public education efforts concentrated on the history of the system, the value of non-partisan appointment of judges, the role of judges, and the fact that a capable judiciary is essential to democracy. Through “The Vote’s in YOUR COURT” Floridians were encouraged to make informed merit retention vote decisions.

Young traveled across the state to speak to community and legal groups, meet with reporters and editorial boards and appear on television and radio programs. With the League of Women Voters and other groups, voter guides were distributed and information was provided online and via social media. Ultimately, 85 percent of the voters who voted in the presidential race, also voted in the merit retention race, compared to 75 percent in 2008.

Balancing a Career With Community Efforts

When Young started work as an assistant state attorney she was assigned to the juvenile division. There, through the dependency cases she handled, she saw firsthand the tragic and long-term impacts of child abuse.

“Once I went into the felony division, I prosecuted many child abuse, sexual abuse, and other matters involving children,” Young remembers. “I realized there was a tremendous need for coordinated services among various agencies working with abused and neglected children.”

Young played a leading role in founding the Child Abuse Council Inc. Today, the organization helps ensure that children have access to crucial social services.

For more than three decades, Young has excelled in her legal career while devoting significant time to the bar, the community, and pro bono work. She blends practicality and passion.

For Young, law school was a tactical decision. After graduating Duke University in 1971 and analyzing her skill sets, personality, and strengths, she decided to enroll in law school at the University of Florida.

She joined Carlton Fields not only for the professional opportunity, but also because the firm demonstrated a deep commitment to the bar, community, and pro bono work. When Young was involved with the Child Abuse Council, the firm assisted with all the related legal work pro bono, from setting up the corporation to obtaining tax exempt status for the nonprofit.

In 2003, Young earned The Florida Bar President’s Pro Bono Award for her involvement in a volunteer intake program and representation of numerous individuals in pro bono matters. She continues to take pro bono cases, primarily in the areas of family law, real estate, and probate matters — work she enjoys because it offers her the opportunity to directly assist individuals and their families.

Breaking Away From the Office

Between her work at Carlton Fields and responsibilities as president of The Florida Bar, it can be a challenge for Young to find personal time. But she is committed to pursuing her personal passions, which include collecting first edition mystery fiction. Although she is not seeking any particular book at this time, the search will undoubtedly resume when Young’s term as president winds down.

Young is an asset to both of her alma maters. A die-hard Duke fan, she is also an active supporter of the University of Florida’s Levin College of Law, where she received her J.D. and currently



Photo By Moorman Photographics

serves as an emeritus trustee of its Law Center Association.

“I’m a big supporter of both the academic and the sports side of Duke,” Young said. “I’ve been involved with fundraising, which is definitely a passion I have. I regularly go to basketball games, although I have to say running for president of the bar impacted my sports viewing.”

“I also owe a great deal to the University of Florida law school. Without the strong legal education I received there, I would not be where I am today. It is the preeminent law school in Florida and is also recognized nationally. It is very important to me to help to ensure that the law school remains strong and continues to grow in stature.”

Young also enjoys spending time with her siblings and taking advantage of the rare opportunity to travel. She tries to take at least one interesting trip each year.

“Balance is something that is very important to me, but is also very hard to attain,” Young said. “In the past couple of years my life has not been quite as balanced as I might like, being involved with work and the campaign. But I always make time to stay involved with community activities and spend time with friends, which is very important.”

At a Glance

Gwynne Young

Florida Bar President – 2012 - 2013

Shareholder at Carlton Fields

4221 West Boy Scout Boulevard, Ste 1000, Tampa, FL

(813) 223-7000

<http://www.carltonfields.com>

Areas of Practice

- Young focuses her practice on complex state and federal litigation. She handles a wide variety of commercial and business disputes, real property litigation including title insurance, and real estate matters as well as probate and trust litigation.
- State Certified Arbitrator and a Member of the AAA Commercial Arbitrator Panel.
- Federal Court Mediator and a Member of the AAA Mediation Panel.

Professional Honors

- AV Rated by Martindale-Hubbell
- Listed in Florida Super Lawyers - 2012
- Selected for inclusion in Florida Trend’s Florida Legal Elite - 2005-2007 and 2009-2012
- Florida Trend Legal Elite Hall of Fame - 2010-2012
- Listed in The Best Lawyers in America 2009-2012 editions
- Herbert Goldberg Award, Trial Lawyers Section of the Hillsborough County Bar - 2009
- The Florida Bar President’s Pro Bono Award - Service Award for Thirteenth Circuit - 2003
- Jimmy Kynes Pro Bono Award for Outstanding Pro Bono Service - Hillsborough County Bar - 1999
- Charles A. Dukes Award for Outstanding Volunteer Service to Duke University – 1995

Education

- University of Florida College of Law (J.D., 1974)
- Executive Editor, *Florida Law Review*
- Duke University (B.A., 1971)

Admissions

- Florida Bar
- Florida State Courts
- Florida Supreme Court
- U.S. Court of Appeals, Eleventh Circuit
- U.S. District Court, Middle District of Florida
- U.S. District Court, Southern District of Florida