

JULIE CIBULSKIS

Excellence in Court and Beyond, Wrapped in Energy and Enthusiasm

by Chris Bailey

AURORA—Julie L. Cibulskis does not see a glass as half-empty. Rather, this accomplished attorney lives with *joie de vivre*, as the French would say.

“I love what I do,” says Cibulskis, a partner with Speers, Reuland & Cibulskis in Aurora. The law firm is known for its civility, its success rate in court and the balanced lives of its partners. She is married to Scott Roskuszka, and they have two children, Lauren, 15, and Ian, 13.

“I think she’s got the trifecta,” says Kimberly Davis, co-founder of Spyratos Davis LLC, which has offices in Lisle and Chicago. Davis first met Cibulskis when they were opposing counsel on a case nearly two decades ago.

“She’s got the intellectual intelligence, the emotional intelligence and energy that is never-ending. She’s a great observer of people. She knows how to select a jury and how to talk to a jury. Her word is gold, and her integrity above reproach.”

Davis says Cibulskis also loves a good fight. “She will not hesitate to try a case,” says Davis. “She is very candid and practical with her clients, but she is also a zealous advocate for them. She has legal expertise beyond her years. She knows how to evaluate cases, identify issues and do the research. She will develop expertise in any area of the law she needs to for her case and has really good command of changes in the law or procedure. She is respected in Kane County by both the judiciary and attorneys. She’s one of the finest attorneys and people I know.”

Dan Whiston, of Smith Amundsen LLC in St. Charles, says he found himself opposing Cibulskis early in his career and he, too, discovered she enjoys a good court battle.

“We look forward to cases where she’s in opposition because we know it will be a great, honorable fight,” says Whiston. “She’s an excellent litigator with great demeanor and confidence. She knows her stuff and can articulate it very well. She’s a star in our profession who handles an adversarial position with class. Someone may be being disingenuous on the stand. She’ll point it out but will do it without attacking them. She does it with class.



She always respects the decorum of the setting.”

“She’s got a positive attitude on life, whether it involves legal or other issues,” says 23rd Circuit Court Judge Robert Pilmer, who presides in Kendall County. “She’s got a good grasp on life in general, and she’s respected as a leader by other attorneys.” Cibulskis is a former president of the Kane County Bar Association.

As a judge, Pilmer appreciates that she is habitually punctual and always prepared, but he says other traits make her a courtroom favorite.

“I can’t say I’ve always ruled in her favor, but that never changed our professional relationship,” Pilmer says. “Her presentations at court are not given to emotion or animated gestures. She always brings logic, facts and knowledge of the law with her. No matter how the case turns out, she’s very respectful of the judge and opposing counsel. I love to have her in my courtroom.”

Cibulskis did not set out to be a lawyer. She was a psychology major at Creighton University

in Omaha, Nebraska, when she interned with a county sheriff, monitoring at-risk children.

“It piqued my interest,” says Cibulskis, who received a bachelor’s degree from Creighton and a J.D. from the Seton Hall University School of Law in Newark, New Jersey.

ENJOYING TRIAL WORK

She wasn’t particularly interested in litigation when she started law school, either, but again, a personal experience altered her thinking.

“I was working at a juvenile justice clinic on a case involving a child whose parents were both chronic paranoid schizophrenics,” she says. The justice clinic was appointed to represent the minor and despite still being in law school at the time, Cibulskis was assigned to handle the trial.

“I made the arguments and cross-examined the witnesses,” says Cibulskis, who also handled the appeal of the case. She has enjoyed trial work ever since.

Cibulskis, who was born and raised in Aurora, clerked for Bob Speers and Tim Reuland in her second year of law school.

“I considered other firms,” says Cibulskis, of her post-law school plans. “But Tim convinced me of the mentoring and quality of life I could find here.”

About 60 percent of her cases are injury-related, but she also does commercial litigation, contested trusts and estates, and pro bono work.

Cibulskis says her best skills are “listening to people” and then acting in their best interests.

“When people come to see me, I always ask what their objective is,” she says. “I have to know what their goals are.”

That question elicits a variety of responses, but they tend to fall roughly into three categories, she says.

“Some clients want someone to accept responsibility for the injury,” says Cibulskis. “Some simply want or need financial compensation. Others just want their story to be heard and be believed.”

Once she knows a client’s goals, Cibulskis presents the legal options. Sometimes a client will not back down, citing principle as the reason.

“I had a commercial case I could have settled for a fraction of the litigation costs, but the client did not want to pay money when he felt he’d done nothing wrong,” says Cibulskis. “To him, it was about the principle, not the money. That’s rare, so if a client wants to make a stand on principle, I tell them the risks and costs of litigation.”

Cibulskis also tells the story of an accident case in which the defendant was driving while intoxicated. Cibulskis and her partners obtained a good result for the plaintiff, something the defendant apparently noted.

“Years later, he came to me because his son has been injured by a drunk driver,” says Cibulskis. “It was a compliment to have a former defendant hire me as a plaintiff’s attorney.”

More than a few of her cases involve people trying to wade through the paperwork morasses that are the American health care and insurance systems. Typically, they enter her office carrying a hospital collection letter or a lien notice. Often, they will discover the hospital never submitted its charges to their medical insurance company.

“Medical providers want to receive full payment from a lawsuit rather than a discounted payment from health insurance,” says Cibulskis. “If I could pass a law to change that, believe me, I would.”

She says similar issues have arisen with Medicare patients involved in an accident.

“I’ve had clients on Medicare who were told by medical providers that they are not covered by Medicare because the treatment



Galena golf, from left: Cibulskis, Kimberly Davis, Jean Cibulskis, Norma Williams



At 2009 installation as KCBA president. From left: parents Richard and Jean Cibulskis, Cibulskis, husband Scott Roskuszka, in-laws Jacqueline and Walter Roskuszka



From left: daughter Lauren, husband Scott Roskuszka, Cibulskis, son Ian

involved an accident,” says Cibulskis. “Once again, the providers would rather get paid more money through the case than receive discounted Medicare payments. I tell patients that Medicare does cover accidents, and we work to submit their claims to Medicare.”

LIGHT AT TUNNEL'S END

As upsetting as such cases are, they often are less emotional than estate cases wherein siblings go to war over their parents' assets. One such case involved a client, Ibiloya Forgacs-Sakellaris, and her brother.

“He got money, but he wanted more,” says Forgacs-Sakellaris. “And to think he's a minister.”

She says she and her husband cared for her mother for 10 years at the end of her life, much of it provided in their own home, while her siblings in California rarely contributed or called. Forgacs-Sakellaris decided to fight back when the brother tried to dismiss her efforts and “wasn't even willing to abide by the California will he helped get written.”

“When you've done everything in your power to care for ailing parents and your actions are questioned, you can't help but take offense,” says Cibulskis. “It is almost like a divorce from your siblings. But the mother's physicians supported my client, and the case was resolved. My client even received payment for her services to her mother.”

“Now, there is no way he can further appeal or dispute anything,” says Forgacs-Sakellaris, of her brother. “Julie guided me, and I listened to her. She was very compassionate, understanding and supportive. It was important to me that she believed me. My dad taught me to know what your rights are. I wasn't looking for a killing. I think I got what I deserved, nothing more.”

And is she satisfied? “Absolutely,” says Forgacs-Sakellaris.

“She was the light at the end of my tunnel,” Forgacs-Sakellaris says. “I'm not one for referrals, but I would be comfortable referring someone to Julie. You can tell she enjoys what she does. There's nothing dirty or underhanded. She abides by the law and is straightforward and honest. She makes sure her ducks are in a row so she can represent you 100 percent.”

Beyond being a light at the end of a client's tunnel, Cibulskis has other skills that are highly respected by those in her profession.

“She has an uncanny ability to recall facts,” says Tom Grant, a sole practitioner in Yorkville. “She has great writing ability, a wonderful courtroom demeanor and excellent cross-examination skills. She's a litigator, and I am not. We've referred many cases to her and

her firm. They are as friendly as can be, and they've garnered great results. She so enjoys it. I think that's one of the reasons she's so good at it.”

Judy Brawka retired from the bench at the 16th Judicial Circuit after 25 years, so she knows Cibulskis as a legal colleague. But as a former neighbor in Aurora, she also knew Cibulskis as a youngster, a teenager and a college student. She's also credited by Cibulskis as being one of the reasons she became a lawyer.

“That's so flattering,” says Brawka. “But I think she would have made it without me. I'm sure I spoke to her about my career experiences, but it wasn't until she was in college that she talked to me about law school.”

A BRIGHT FUTURE

Brawka didn't hesitate to encourage Cibulskis toward the law.

“I could tell it was a good choice for her for a career, and I told her that,” says Brawka. “She volunteered with me once she decided. I always made sure my clerks got experience in court and then would do the legal research to provide context.”

Though she has watched mostly from afar recently, Brawka sounds as proud of Cibulskis as a parent might be.

“I'm proud to have known her and called her a colleague,” says Brawka. “There aren't many female partners out here, and in 2004, it was very rare. She's a wonderful woman who leads by example in both her career and her personal life.”

Brawka is disappointed, though, that Cibulskis hasn't become a judge.

“I thought she'd have been a great judge in Kane County,” says Brawka. “I'd love to see her take those skills, that heart and that experience to the bench.”

That said, Brawka says Cibulskis' greatest attribute might be a skill that can't be taught.

“Her greatest strength is her ability to perceive human nature,” says Brawka. “She's very sensitive to verbal and non-verbal clues. She knows who is lying and who is telling the truth. I don't know if it can even be taught. I think it's almost innate. She easily reads and communicates with people.”

And she believes Cibulskis' unique skill in that area is why she is among the lawyers Brawka views as outstanding.

“There are no stupid lawyers,” says Brawka. “Some are really book smart and study hard. They all have the intellect to do it. But to be very outstanding as a lawyer and in life, you generally have to have a sound perception of human nature. Her future is one of those that will always be bright.” ■