

Helping Hand(s), by Nancy Powers --Ladue News, February 13, 2004

Being a trial lawyer for a huge corporation was a real eye-opener for attorney Marta Papa, whose practice focuses exclusively on divorce. "It was so impersonal and unsatisfying," she recalls. In order to find a more fulfilling way to practice law-a profession she was passionate about-Papa began taking courses in alternative dispute resolution. "One course in family law really captivated me," she recalls. "Suddenly, it just felt right."

Defending a real person whose future would depend on the outcome was exactly what Papa had imagined as an idealistic law student. As she continued to learn about mediation, she also studied psychology, earning a post-graduate certificate in marriage and family therapy at the Menninger Psychiatric Institute. "The skills I learned encouraged me to become more involved with mediation training," she says.

Papa now practices mediation and collaborative law. "The goal is to avoid the protracted court battles that often occur when couples divorce," she says. Although many people view divorce as a fight between a husband and wife, Papa has a different perspective. "I see it as a crisis for the family that needs more than one kind of help to resolve," she says. With that in mind, Papa approaches divorce as a team effort.

"I work with two extremely qualified professionals: a financial planner, Bill Chamberlin, and a therapist, Lee Streett, LPC. We each have our own practices, but their offices are on-site. This saves clients the hassle of running all over town to meet with people." Papa believes that by working in close proximity the team can be more cost effective. "We often discuss cases over lunch or drop in one another's offices during the day."

When people first visit Papa's office, they often don't even know what they need. "Perhaps there are two assets, a house and a 401K for example, that appear to be of equal value. That may not be the case. That's when the services of a financial planner are invaluable. Only someone with experience can explain the repercussions of the decisions a client is about to make," she says.

However, these services are entirely optional. "I want to make the information available to clients who want a plan, not just answers to questions like who gets the sofa and who gets the entertainment center."

Helping clients move forward into a new and satisfying life is what Papa hopes to accomplish. "It is a new life," she insists, "and I hope clients will avail themselves of all the resources we offer. I want them to feel confident in their decisions and be willing to create a written plan for their future-not just for the immediate situation."