

LAW WEEK

COLORADO

Up-And-Coming Lawyers: 2014

This year's class of Up-and-Coming Lawyers includes two young attorneys who have already established their own practices, a former Division 1 soccer player, one of the co-counsels from a marriage equality case that changed the law in Colorado, a bilingual and scientifically minded former military man, a former professional swing dancer and an emerging sports law guru.

Emily Powell

THERE AREN'T MANY activities that can match the speed, agility and flexibility that swing dancing requires, but for Emily Powell, a former professional in the discipline, the demands of the legal profession provide her with a similar thrill.

Powell, who grew up in Fort Collins and attended Colorado State University for college, focuses on special districts in her practice with Ireland Stapleton Pryor & Pascoe.

A handful of professors in college fostered Powell's interest in and passion for government and politics, she said.

"I loved school," she said. "When I was younger, I got the attendance award at the end of the year because I didn't miss a day."

Powell began thinking about law school during her sophomore year in college. She applied and was accepted at William & Mary Law School, which provided her with the unique opportunity to study within the nexus of politics, government and law.

"William & Mary is (one of) the oldest law schools in the country, and it is so steeped in U.S. history and government," she said. "I couldn't pass up the opportunity."

From the outset, Powell was focused on finding a career within the government realm.

She spent her first summer of law school clerking for the public defender's office, and while she enjoyed that experience, it wasn't what she wanted long term.

The second summer she worked for Ireland Stapleton, which like many firms, circulated her through the range of practice areas. When she rotated into the special district practice, something clicked.

"I fell in love with the practice and knew it when I found it," she said.

When Ireland Stapleton extended her an offer, she accepted on the spot, knowing that she'd found the right place and her passion.

In her first year of practice, she handled a mix of work from all of the firm's practice areas, but she slowly gravitated to the special district practice group.

"We provide a range of general counsel services," she said. "Everything from financial matters like navigating local budget laws and the Taxpayers' Bill of Rights, to contract drafting and



negotiations, helping during their elections, employment law issues, real property acquisitions and more."

The highlight of the work for Powell is the interaction with clients.

"What's special is that the people who serve on these elected boards are not career politicians," she said. "They are people who want to contribute and give back and do something really good."

Powell has met and mingled with her fair share of people working with and for special districts.

This year, she created a free, full-day traveling workshop designed to deliver needed legal and operational training to park and recreation district board members and executive directors throughout Colorado.

She enlisted the help of two special district management consultants to provide maximum value to these local governments, addressing such important topics as the Colorado Open Records Act, governmental immunity, Americans with Disabilities Act, statutory compliance, cooperative structures and contract

drafting, the Fair Labor Standards Act and facility operations and maintenance.

Her "parks-and-recreation road show" traveled to all areas of the state, and she has plans to revive it in the new year to visit additional areas.

She will also likely spend some time at the Capitol next year as she's done in the past.

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Since she started with the firm, Powell has been involved in shaping the laws affecting Colorado's special districts. In 2013, she drafted and helped to pass House Bill 1302, which streamlined the consolidation process for two or more special districts that provide, or are authorized to provide, the same services.

The aim of the bill was reducing the

size of government through consolidation and enabling the emerging special district to provide more cost-effective and efficient public services.

Last year, Powell was also instrumental in creating a fire authority to provide emergency services on behalf of two fire protection districts in western Colorado, and she subsequently assisted the fire

protection districts in a full merger of their organizations.

It's all part of the job for Powell.

"The people I work with have passion for what they do," she said. "They get paid little to nothing to do lots of work to implement changes, and it gives me such a great feeling to help them." •

—Meg Satrom, Esq., Meg@CircuitMedia.com