

Divorce experts

by Kathy Smith

Take a look at the state's renowned divorce attorneys and mediators who not only specialize in but revel in issues such as separating finances and sharing kids.



PHOTOS: CARLSON PHOTOGRAPHY



ATTORNEYS

SHEILA GUTTERMAN

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ACCORDING TO SHEILA GUTTERMAN, who is considered the founder of collaborative law, "I always knew I wanted to be a divorce lawyer." The move into family law practice proved to be a prudent one for Sheila, who holds a master's degree in guidance counseling. She entered law school midlife, passed the bar and began litigating cases.

By 1990, Sheila was lecturing nationally and internationally on the benefits of mediation in divorce cases. One of her first mediation lectures was at Canyon Ranch, a health spa in Arizona. "There were only about eight attendees, who all showed up with pillows and blankets, and within the first 15 minutes they started leaving one by one. They thought it was a seminar on *meditation*," she recalls with a giggle.

Since then, Sheila's stalwart presence in the divorce law community is commendable. She wrote the outline for the family law section of the bar, founded Colorado Collaborative Law Professionals and achieved many other firsts too numerous to mention.

"In our firm, we handpick people who will work together because we know divorce is one of the biggest stresses," she explains. The firm's goal is to get cases settled before anyone reaches the steps of the court—and 95 percent of the time they achieve that goal. Clients have three options: collaborative law, mediation or litigation. "Mediation and collaborative law are siblings," Sheila explains.

The firm works like a village, so that when one attorney goes in for a hearing, they are all prepared. "If you're prepared in all areas, the judges will listen, and you need to know the judges."

MEGAN SHERR

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WITH A BACKGROUND SIMILAR to her colleague Sheila Gutterman, Megan Sherr's undergraduate degree is in mediation and counseling and she spent several years litigating cases after law school. Under the tutelage of former District Attorney Bill Ritter, Megan prosecuted special juvenile-related cases, which gave her extensive family law knowledge and practice. In 2003, she decided to pursue family law and joined Gutterman Griffiths, where she became a shareholder a mere 18 months later.

Megan's goal is always to achieve a non-adversarial, amicable solution in a divorce, even one that is hotly contested. "It is always in the best interest of the children to create a new family solution," she says. "The parties always come in bleeding, so I try to arrive at a solution one Band-Aid at a time."

To achieve this goal, Megan reminds her clients of the big picture. "I try to get my clients to not focus on the other party—to try to remind them that they are entitled to happiness," she says. One of her clients couldn't quite get the big picture in his head; he was determined to get a set of 18-year-old sheets back that he brought into the marriage. "That's a classic case of fighting a battle that isn't worth it," Megan states.

Megan works her cases through the judicial system by preparing herself before approaching a judge. "In our seven-county area we have phenomenal, well-groomed judges in family law who are knowledgeable and willing to do the right thing for the parties and especially the children," she explains. Continuity, consistency and predictability are what Megan hopes her clients achieve throughout and after the divorce process. "If there are children involved, this is extremely important," she says.