



Driven to Serve, Ready to Fight

In legal matters pertaining to everything from family law and estate law to personal injury and criminal defense, the attorneys of Ciccarelli Law Offices solve problems for “clients in crisis”

by Bill Donahue | photography by Jody Robinson

To consider the character of the West Chester-based law firm Ciccarelli Law Offices, one must first consider the roots of its founder, Lee A. Ciccarelli.

Ciccarelli came of age in Williamsport, a small Pennsylvania town west of Wilkes-Barre, as part of a large, happy family of relatively modest means. His father ran a successful clothing store in town, and his mother was a public school teacher. Both were committed to putting each of their eight children on a path to living a purpose-driven life devoted to helping others.

After earning his undergraduate degree from Bucknell University, Ciccarelli followed

his parents' example and decided to “make a difference” by pursuing a career in the legal field. He proceeded to The George Washington University Law School in Washington, D.C., from which he earned his Juris Doctor. After having successfully passed the bar exam, he began working as a trial lawyer in cases pertaining to personal injury, criminal defense and workers' compensation.

Ciccarelli spent 10 years working for other firms before starting his own firm in Chester County. Early on, his firm's caseload was focused in areas of the law that were familiar to him from earlier in his career. Over time, as his clients' legal needs expanded,

his team grew and so did the firm's areas of expertise—from personal injury and criminal defense to estate law and family law.

Since its founding in 1999, Ciccarelli Law Offices has also extended its reach, from its main office in West Chester to satellite offices in Center City, Lancaster, Plymouth Meeting, Radnor and Springfield, all to serve clients from Lancaster County in the west to metro Philadelphia in the east. The firm now boasts a team of approximately 10 attorneys, which includes a robust, family law practice.

A natural extension of the firm practice was in the area of family and matrimonial law, including divorce, child support, alimony, child

custody, separation agreements, name-change petitions, mediation and prenuptial agreements.

"It was only natural for clients that had used our services in personal injury and criminal defense matters to look for an attorney they knew and could trust to handle their important family law case," Ciccarelli says. "In areas like personal injury, family law and criminal defense, we are dealing with clients in crisis. Sometimes they are in despair. Sometimes they have no one to believe in them. Our first responsibility in being their advocate is earning their trust, being compassionate about their circumstances and passionate for their cause, and that sometimes includes thinking of the client as a family member."

Ciccarelli believes he knows what makes a successful family law practice: a team of passionate and caring lawyers with the resources, experience, passion and determination to make a difference for clients.

"Family law is a very difficult area of practice," he says. "In personal injury or criminal defense, one side is the victim, but in most cases of family law, everyone is a victim—the spouse or partner, their children, their extended families.

What is more important to anyone than their family? A divorce or custody dispute can put your family at jeopardy.

"One of the things we do as attorneys is provide guidance and stewardship, and I think part of that stewardship is to provide reasonable advice and counseling," he continues. "If you're trying to cause living hell for another person, we

may not be the best attorney for you. Our attorneys are forceful and go into a fight with the intention of winning, but you also have to have reasonable, rational goals, and those goals change from case to case."

When establishing such goals, the firm carefully considers the costs to the client—both financial and emotional.

"If we have two people in a divorce—Mom and Dad—who are both good people but they both want primary custody, obviously that isn't going to happen," Ciccarelli adds. "We will work to attain what our client wants, but we have no interest in destroying the other person, because it's not in the best interest of the child."

The family law practice is managed by attorneys Michelle Power and Ryan Buchanan, who work as a team on behalf of their clients. Power considers it her responsibility to fight for her clients' rights, yet, like Ciccarelli, she considers her primary role as an advocate and an adviser. In other words, she not only works to position a client to be on firm fi-

nancial footing in the aftermath of a divorce but also fights fair in the process.

"Sometimes I'm required to put on the punching gloves, but what I try to do with each client is help them step back and see the whole picture," says Power, who earned her Juris Doctor from Widener University School of Law. "I try to empathize with every client I have to put myself in their shoes because that's really my job as an advocate. Clients are not only hiring us to receive advice and file paperwork. They want an attorney who understands and will tirelessly fight for justice. When there are children involved, I may be a little more outspoken, because you still have to deal with each other at weddings and birthday parties even after the divorce is final, so it's in everyone's best interest to be civil."

The firm's wide-ranging expertise enables attorneys practicing in different areas to collaborate on a client's behalf. For divorce cases in which a client seeks protection from harm at the hands of an abusive spouse, for example, one of Ciccarelli Law Offices' criminal law attorneys can file a protection-from-abuse order or restraining order, according

to Ryan W.C. Buchanan, who works alongside Power in the firm's family law practice.

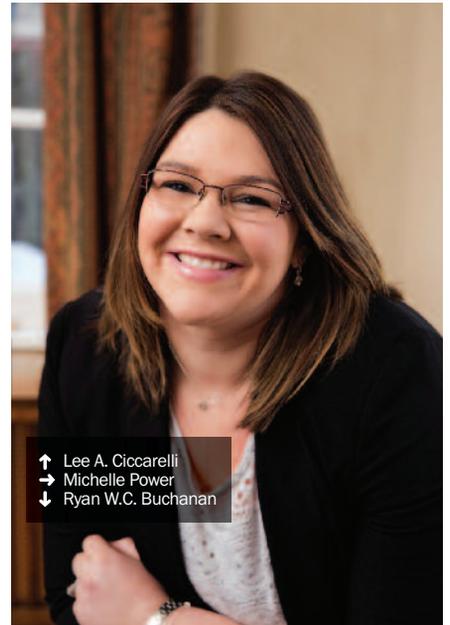
"That's one of the benefits with a firm like ours," says Buchanan, a graduate of Duquesne University School of Law, who joined the firm with seven years of legal experience. "Every attorney has his or her area of expertise. Michelle and I work together in family law, and we can also en-

gage with other departments to get their input as to where a case should proceed. Just like it is with seeing a doctor or with a car that needs to be repaired, getting that second opinion can be very valuable."

Whether it pertains to family law or another legal need, Ciccarelli has worked diligently to assemble a team of attorneys with values shared by Power and Buchanan: intellectually curious professionals who are passionate about protecting clients' rights.

"I believe we are developing a reputation as hardworking, passionate, ethical lawyers who fight for the client," says Ciccarelli. "If I am a client who is going through a dramatic time in my life, I need an advocate who is going to come up with answers, not additional questions. I'm looking to my attorneys to provide guidance and leadership to get me through it. I'm looking for a team of experts who are available when I need them, and who provide confidence and a sense of peace that I am doing the right thing. That's what we try to do for every client." ■

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↑ Lee A. Ciccarelli
→ Michelle Power
↓ Ryan W.C. Buchanan

