

Local woman went from factory floor to attorney in eight years



Shelley Huffman said the realization hit her in 1998 as she helped manufacture gas regulators at a Colon factory. She'd put off her dream of going to college long enough!

"I always wanted to go back to school and do more with my life. My dream was to become an attorney, but I always kept putting college off. One day I decided to go to Glen Oaks Community College and look into it. I began a class and one class led to another. Pretty soon I decided to keep going all the way," recalled Huffman, who now has her own legal practice in Colon.

Huffman went from "factory to law practice" in eight years.

After starting classes at Glen Oaks in 1998, she first earned the Associate of Business degree and then decided to continue another year for an Associate of General Studies (transfer) degree. Despite her full-time job and a family, Huffman applied herself and her grades put her in the Phi Theta Kappa academic honorary society for two-year college students. The Associate of General Studies helped Huffman seamlessly begin college classes at Governors State University, University Park, Illinois. "One of my business professors, Bill Furr, mentioned the Governors State program and the Illinois school accepted all of my credits from Glen Oaks," Huffman explained. Though some of the Governors State University classes were available online, she made numerous trips to the Chicago-area campus.

That first year of university classes was not easy, recalled Huffman.

In 2004, Huffman quit her job to devote more time to her studies. Her husband, John, an employee at the Wal-Mart Distribution Center at Coldwater, took over many of the household chores and caring for the children. "I couldn't have done it without the support of my husband and kids. John drove the kids to school events, cooked and did laundry," Huffman explained.

Then, even before finishing classes at Governors State University, Huffman was accepted at The Thomas M. Cooley Law School. "I enrolled in 12-16 credit hours each semester. So I spent 15 hours a week on the road and 50 hours a week in Lansing. I'd spend from three to nine hours a day in classes and the rest of the time studying in the law library," said Huffman. She graduated from Cooley Law School in January 2007, took the bar exam in February, received her results in May and was sworn-in as an attorney in June 2007. Huffman opened her home office in August that year and is now one of several attorneys in Colon.

While establishing her legal practice, Huffman also taught several classes at Glen Oaks. "I always felt like I wanted to give back to the college, so I taught public speaking, keyboarding and reading (college foundation) classes as a part-time instructor. I always tell the students my story and remind them that they are getting started at the right place," she added.

"I've been in my law practice now for almost two years and things are going very well. More and more people are stopping by to see me," Huffman said, adding that her general practice includes estates, wills and trusts, durable powers of attorney, divorces, child custody, adoptions and some criminal defense.

Huffman found being an attorney has changed her life in many ways.

"Several times a week I have to be in court at St. Joseph County (Centreville), Branch County (Coldwater) or Calhoun County (Battle Creek), so it works out well to live in Colon and be midway

between them. I also had to buy some new suits for court appearances. I do my own secretarial work, so the business training from Glen Oaks comes in handy,” Huffman laughed.

Speaking of the education process that took her from the factory floor to area courtrooms, Huffman said her best courses were at Glen Oaks Community College. “The faculty members are so helpful and inspiring. They prepared me well for what came later. One of my favorites was Professor of English Kevin Gave. I learned so much in his classes, especially about writing,” Huffman said.

What advice does Huffman have for others straddling the fence with indecision about returning to the classroom?

“Don’t wait. If you feel like you want to go to college and do more with your life. Do it! It will all fall into place,” said Huffman.