

Trailblazer, Role Model and Advocate: Introducing 94th Chancellor **Lauren P. McKenna**

BY THE HONORABLE WENDY G. ROTHSTEIN

It is difficult to predict what 2021 will bring for the world or the legal community. If I had to speculate, it will be another year of virtual reality. There is no better person than Lauren McKenna to lead the way.

I'm honored and privileged to have the opportunity to tell you about Lauren, my friend, former colleague and the next Chancellor of the Philadelphia Bar Association. Through continuous pursuit of work-life balance, Lauren has succeeded in establishing harmony among family, career, community and self.

Lauren is intelligent, hardworking, trailblazing, loyal, trustworthy, innovative, organized and empathetic — qualities that are obvious to anyone who knows her. However, Lauren's diplomatic skills are what will guide her through these unprecedented times. She will actively seek and consider your input, recommendations and advice, but she will not vacillate. Lauren is nothing if not decisive. In the end, she knows that the buck stops with her. She will not be afraid to make difficult decisions, when necessary, and her diplomatic skills will allow her to bring everyone on board in an effort to move forward and go above and beyond in 2021.

The daughter of Bob and Carol McKenna, Lauren was born in and spent the first six years of her life in San Juan, Puerto Rico, where her father had been assigned a territory by his company, Hertz Rental Car. As a result, Lauren was bilingual as a child, an asset that is highly valued today, but was frowned upon when she was growing up.

After leaving Puerto Rico, Lauren and her family moved multiple times, eventually landing in Tappan, N.Y., where she attended Tappan Zee High School, which — like the former bridge — derives its name from the nearby Tappan Zee section of the Hudson River. The high school's athletic teams are known as the Dutchmen, named after the early Dutch settlers who flocked to the area in the 1600s. In high school, Lauren was a three-year member of the band drill team and was named captain for two years. Anyone who has observed drill teams knows that they have a reputation for precision and organization — two skills that would serve Lauren well in years to come.

Lauren bonded with younger brother, Ken, and their Dad, Bob, over sports. Her father had season tickets to the New York Giants, and would alternate between taking Lauren and her brother with him to games. Although Lauren was a huge Giants fan growing up, (nobody is perfect) she corrected this unfortunate flaw by becoming an Eagles fan after moving to Philadelphia.

Lauren attended Siena College, graduating in 1985 with a bachelor's degree, and went on to study law at Fordham University School of Law, earning a J.D. in 1990. Between undergraduate and law school, Lauren worked as a paralegal at the Wall Street law firm of Carter, Ledyard and Milburn, as well as Lowenstein





(left photo) Lauren with her son Philip at her admission to the United States Supreme Court and (Right photo) Glacier National Park, Avalanche Lake Hike.

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Sandler, where she discovered a love for the law and cemented her desire to be an attorney.

It was at college that Lauren would meet Damian Morabito, the love of her life. Lauren and Damian met during happy hour at a dance club named Cahoots near the Siena College campus. Damian was a senior at a nearby college and Lauren was a junior. It was a chance meeting, especially since Damian had a final exam the next day and decided to go to the club anyway. She married her college sweetheart in 1990, and Damian and Lauren

recently celebrated their 30th anniversary. “Who says you can’t meet a nice girl at a happy hour?” Damian is fond of saying. A native of Plymouth Meeting who attended Germantown Academy, Damian was initially involved in the Morabito Baking Company, a fourth-generation family-owned business based in Norristown. He now owns and manages another family-owned business, Topos Mondial Corp., which designs and fabricates bakery machinery worldwide.

Together, Lauren and Damian have three children, all of whom



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attended the Radnor School District. Philip, their first, is 26 and an assistant dean of admissions at Franklin & Marshall College. Their other two children, Christopher and Alexandra, are 21-year-old twins. Christopher is a senior at Bentley University and Alexandra is a senior at Skidmore College. With Damian on the road frequently for business, Lauren picked up the lion's share of the parenting responsibilities. Early in her career, Lauren was a working professional managing her law practice while caring for three children under the age of five. The twins were born prematurely at 32 weeks, which meant Lauren and Damian had to balance their work with parenting a 4-year-old child and visiting the twins, who were in the hospital for nearly two months.

Lauren's ability to walk this tightrope is not lost on her children. Her daughter Alexandra describes her mom as "hard working, she is inspiring and a loving mother, a caring person, empathetic, successful and strong-willed." All of Lauren's children are inspired by their mother's work ethic and drive to persevere. Lauren has the ability "to flip the switch easily from being a caring mom to a working professional," Alexandra says. "She has the ability to go back and forth and not let each affect the other." Lauren's husband uses the analogy that she is "like a duck, she glides coolly and calmly above the water line while paddling vigorously below."

Upon graduation from law school, Lauren joined the Philadelphia office of Fox Rothschild LLP. She has practiced her entire career at Fox, making partner in 1998. She focuses her practice on real estate litigation with a primary emphasis on title and flood insurance litigation. She regularly appears in state and federal courts across the United States and has earned a reputation for sound judgment and innovative problem solving.

Lauren is well known among lender and flood zone determination companies, routinely defending them in matters involving claims brought in connection with the 1973 Flood Disaster Protection Act and the 1994 National Flood Insurance Reform Act. She serves as national counsel for one of the flood zone determination industry's largest companies and regularly represents others in the industry on matters of importance. Lauren also frequently writes and speaks on federal, state and local legislation and other topics impacting the flood industry.

Lauren co-chairs the firm's Title Insurance Group with Edward Hayes. She is well respected and heavily relied upon by title insurance companies as well as their agents and insureds.

At Fox, Lauren was elected to and served on the firm's executive management committee. In addition to co-chairing the Title Insurance Group, Lauren is the former co-chair of the firm's Litigation Department Training Program. She is co-chair of Fox's Women's Initiative, a role in which she has served since its inception. The Women's Initiative is dedicated to promoting female attorneys within the firm as well as advancing Fox's female attorneys in the legal community.

Lauren recently reached her 30-year anniversary at Fox. Throughout those years, she has been a trailblazer, role model and strong advocate for women at the firm. She leads by example, a personal quality that was in evidence when Lauren was a working mom of three children under the age of five. Lauren's success in working a reduced schedule while at Fox helped convince the firm to formally adopt a reduced schedule policy.

Lauren is well respected by her colleagues. "Lauren has always been an important force at Fox Rothschild," commented former



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Bar Association Chancellor and Fox Chair Emeritus Abe Reich. “As a young lawyer and mother, she convinced the firm to allow her to work part-time — an unheard of status at that time. Not surprisingly, she outperformed expectations and thereby created a wider path for women at the firm for decades to follow.”

Stephanie Resnick, the managing partner of Fox’s Philadelphia office, summed it up: “Lauren is a role model for men and women attorneys alike. She has been instrumental in bringing women’s and working parents’ issues to the forefront. Lauren is the consummate professional. She is smart, thoughtful and consistently exercises excellent judgment. I am proud to be her partner and friend.”

Hayes, Lauren’s long-time mentor and co-chair of Fox’s Title Insurance Group also had glowing praise for Lauren: “I have known and worked very closely with Lauren for almost 30 years. It has been a pleasure to see her grow and mature into a seasoned attorney who has a strong grasp of not only the law, but also of the practice of law. She devotes the time and effort necessary to understand a problem and to determine the most expeditious way to resolve that problem. Clients are very well served by having Lauren as their advocate and I am extremely proud to have her as my partner.”

Beyond Fox, Lauren regularly writes for and presents lectures to various insurance groups on issues of importance.

Lauren has always been a working mom, but that doesn’t mean she works and is a mom -- she works simultaneously at both. Everything is a priority to Lauren and somehow she has figured out how to meet all of her commitments to her family, her career, her community and her friends. She is the ultimate multitasker.

One particular day among many spent on the sidelines of her son Christopher’s baseball games provides the perfect example. Lauren was among many parents cheering their sons on from the stands, but was likely the only one doing so while reviewing a deposition transcript. On this occasion, she caught the attention of Steve Kelly, a business owner and the president of Eagles Fly for Leukemia, a charity that supports research and breakthrough therapies with the goal of curing childhood leukemia. The encounter brought together Lauren’s dedication to family, commitment to her clients and devotion to serving her community. It was the start of Lauren’s long-term relationship with the charity, which provides financial support to families and scholarships to pediatric cancer patients and survivors. (To learn more, visit eaglesfly.org.) Lauren helped Kelly by providing legal services, forming a lifelong friendship, and opening a new door for continued community involvement with Eagles Fly for Leukemia.

It’s far from the only example of Lauren’s service to the community. Lauren is involved in numerous organizations and provides pro bono representation through the Philadelphia Volunteers for the Indigent Program. She serves as a director

on multiple boards including Philadelphia Legal Assistance, Community Legal Services and the Siena College Board of Advisors. She is now president of the Eagles Fly for Leukemia charity.

Amid all of her many commitments to her family, career and community, Lauren also carves out time to take care of herself. Maintaining her impressive pace requires stamina. She is an avid biker and fitness enthusiast, which helps explain where she finds the unlimited energy to achieve balance. She also enjoys reading, gardening and going to the Jersey Shore. Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, Lauren and Damian spent a great deal of time at their shore house in Cape May. Gardening is one of their favorite hobbies, an avocation that usually combines Lauren’s landscape design vision and Damian’s dirt-under-the-fingernails labor. Even in her down time, Lauren manages to achieve excellence. Their shelter-in-place gardening efforts caught the eye of their Jersey Shore neighbors, who awarded them Cape May Garden of the Month in June 2020.

Much like 2020, the upcoming year will present challenges for the Bar Association and its Chancellor. Bar associations provide educational and advocacy support and act as an intermediary with the courts, even when the role must be accomplished virtually via videoconferencing applications such as Zoom. Her challenge will be to continue the vital social and networking avenues the Association provides in the virtual reality of 2021. So, until we can meet in person again, expect Zoom happy hours, Zoom trivia nights and other Zoom activities. Luckily for

us, there is no better leader than Lauren to take over the role of Chancellor at this moment. She has exactly the skills and energy to ensure that the Bar Association will continue to meet the needs of the legal community in this moment and this new environment.

In closing, I am reminded of the quote from the late poet, Maya Angelou, “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” I am confident that in this upcoming year, Lauren will make people feel like they are respected, listened to and included as part of the process. Good luck Lauren in 2021, another year of virtual reality.



Honorable Wendy G. Rothstein serves as a Judge in Montgomery County Court of Common Pleas. She was a partner with Lauren at Fox Rothschild LLP.