



resident business beat

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Law Office of Julie R. JOHNSON

Tchefuncta resident Julie Johnson (Oaklawn Drive) is an attorney and owner of The Law Office of Julie R. Johnson.

Tell us about your business I have been an attorney for 13 years but opened my own practice four years ago. My firm specializes in estate planning (wills, trusts, etc.), estate administration (successions), special needs planning, Medicaid/VA planning, and elder law. I employ four people in my office.

How did you decide on this profession? When I was growing up, my mother took me to volunteer at the local nursing home once a week. Then during the summers, she would encourage me to volunteer to be a camp counselor at a camp for children with special needs. I think spending so much time doing those things really opened my eyes to some of the challenges facing the elderly and those with special needs. Now, I find myself back in the nursing homes, helping the elderly keep their assets while also getting funding for the long-term care they need. I am also back working with special needs children, helping parents and guardians set up trusts to ensure that their children will be taken care of for the rest of their lives while continuing to keep any government benefits that they might be receiving. I am fortunate to have found an area of law that is rewarding for me. I find that with estate planning clients, you shed a lot of tears, but you get a lot of hugs. And that makes me feel like I am where I need to be.

What prompted you to start your own business? Before I graduated from law school, I started working at a firm that did primarily insurance defense and litigation. While I did enjoy litigation, I was always very interested in estate planning. Once I graduated from law school, I handled all of the estate planning matters for the firm. The more estate planning clients I saw, the more complex issues came up, and I had a strong desire to do some additional training, traveling, and research, in order to really develop the expertise that I felt was necessary to specialize in estate planning. I also knew that all of the training was going to be challenging to coordinate with a busy litigation schedule. So, a few years after becoming a partner at the firm, I

decided to open my own practice to concentrate on estate planning matters. I commuted to Syracuse, NY, for a year and a half to attend the Medicaid Practice Systems program to learn about Medicaid long-term care regulations and how to utilize estate planning techniques to help clients become qualified for the Medicaid benefit. I also successfully completed the exam to become board certified in estate planning and administration, and I became an accredited attorney through the Office of General Counsel/Department of Veterans' Affairs.

What is unique about your firm? I am one of the only attorneys on the Northshore who is board certified in estate planning and administration and also accredited through the Office of General Counsel/Department of Veterans' Affairs. In addition, there are very few law firms who specialize in Medicaid qualification and special needs planning.

Given your expertise, what advice can you offer to other residents of TCE? I would offer these key things:

- Come up with an idea of how you want your estate to flow after you pass away, then talk to an attorney about putting the proper plan in place. The peace of mind in knowing that your family will be taken care in the way that you see fit is invaluable.
- Have a power of attorney, a health-care power of attorney, and a living will in place. There are no better tools to plan for disability. Buy long-term care insurance if you can. If it is not economically feasible to do so, talk to an estate planning attorney about how you can protect your assets otherwise in the event that you need long-term care.

What is your favorite thing about Tchefuncta Estates?

I have lived in TCE with my family since August of 2014 and just love everything about the neighborhood. I love the feeling when I turn onto Pinecrest Drive every day and its like I am in a different world. I love all of the green space and, most of all, I love that my children love it here. I am so happy that they will have great memories of TCE to share with their children.