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## Focus on Philanthropy: Being Part of Something Larger than You

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Focus on philanthropy:

# Being part of something larger than you

BY JONELLA FRANK



I finally understand what it means to change the world.

From the day of their first-year orientation until graduation, students at the OU College of Law are reminded of the ideals and principles of service to clients and society. The message is received

and embraced by the students, as evidenced by their participation in a variety of service events and projects.

The student-driven organization Public Interest Law Students Association is a concrete example of OU Law's commitment to serving the public good. Founded in 2008, PILSA matches student volunteers with government agencies and nonprofit organizations. Since its inception, the organization has recognized student volunteer service totaling 57,000 hours.

Students also learn about working in the nonprofit sector from speakers hosted by the Office of Career Services in its Lunch and Learn series. The desire to improve communities and the lives of the people who reside in those communities motivates many people, lawyers included, to become involved with nonprofit organizations.

The OU Law alumna featured here was moved to dedicate her professional career to serving society. She works at a philanthropic nonprofit organization. Her story reveals what motivated her to utilize her legal education to focus on philanthropy.

**Ginny Bass Carl** ('86) was born in Indianapolis, where she lived with her parents, Jim and Kay Bass, for only three weeks before the family moved to Oklahoma to allow her father to attend law school. She grew up and graduated from high school in El Reno and came to Norman to attend the University of Oklahoma.

After earning a bachelor's degree in accounting from OU in 1983, Carl continued her education at the OU College of Law, fulfilling her childhood desire to be an attorney. "From the fifth grade on, I knew I wanted to be an attorney," she explained. "Practically all the working folks in my family – grandfather, father and uncle – were attorneys. I admired and respected them and was aware of the respect the community had for them. I thought being a lawyer meant I could change the world."

Carl's first job as an attorney was in Honolulu, working in the real estate department of the city's largest law firm. The Hawaii Bar Exam was the first of three she would take and pass during her legal career.

After less than a year, Carl left Honolulu and moved to Dallas for what would be a 17-year period of her life. She took and passed the Texas Bar Exam, and began working in Dallas at a small firm, focusing primarily on civil litigation. Carl later had a corporate/small business and probate practice at another Dallas firm. While working in Dallas, her children, Collin and Rachael, were born.

After the birth of her second child, she stopped practicing law to be a stay-at-home mom and did volunteer work in church, school and nonprofit organizations. During a period of searching for a personal fulfillment that had eluded her in practicing law, she entered the seminary. Carl was hired by her church to train in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program, a Montessori-based approach to the religious education of children.

"I felt I was making a difference and it was wonderful," Carl said. "I was happy and knew I was doing work that positively impacted others. Having a mission motivated me."

However, financial considerations caused her to re-enter the legal workplace. She accepted a job managing a Dallas law firm, merging her business and legal interests and training.

In 2003, Carl moved back to Oklahoma as a single parent and began her first full-time job with a nonprofit organization. Utilizing her undergraduate degree, she worked for nearly five years as a senior accountant and financial analyst at Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation. Based in Oklahoma City and founded in 1946, OMRF is a nationally recognized nonprofit biomedical research institute.

During the time Carl worked in accounting at OMRF, her family expanded to four when she married Peter Carl in 2004. Three years later, with his support, she decided to take the Oklahoma Bar Exam – 21 years after graduating from law school! Although she didn't know if she would ever practice law in Oklahoma, she was certain she needed to achieve this goal for herself and set an example for her children. She took bar review courses in the evenings and on weekends, studied at lunch, and took practice tests at night while still working full time and managing the busy schedules of her family.



## Advice for lawyers considering a career with a nonprofit organization...

"Do it!! When and if it gets in your blood, you cannot imagine doing anything else. And the nonprofit sector needs well-trained, smart people to take them to the next level. There are 19,000 nonprofits in the state of Oklahoma. Oklahoma is one of the most generous states in the union. You are needed to bring these two together to serve those in need, to elevate our society, to brighten our world. Get involved. Find your passion. Even if it's not a lifelong pursuit, you will be exposed to incredible people and learn so much about your community. People in nonprofits take networking to a whole new level. Consider trying it out, see if it's a fit, and use your skills to make a difference doing something you love."

–Ginny Bass Carl

After conquering her third bar exam, Carl said she was motivated to expand her horizons with a new career in the nonprofit sector. In October 2008, she went to work at the Oklahoma Heritage Association as its chief financial officer and in-house counsel. She worked there for two years before returning to OMRF as senior director of development, her current job.

Carl described her work as "the best job" and a great marriage of development and law. "My primary responsibility is planned giving, but we work from a team approach, so I also am active in major gifts, annual appeal, stewardship and tours," she said. "I love giving presentations – on OMRF in general and planned giving in particular."

When talking about the responsibilities of her job, Carl emphasized the importance of relationships. Through her active involvement in a variety of organizations, she is able to develop and maintain professional and social relationships. She is a member of the Oklahoma Bar Association and the Association of Fundraising Professionals, as well as a fellow of the Oklahoma Bar Foundation. She is on the boards of the Oklahoma City Estate Planning Council and the Oklahoma Planned Giving Council. She is the current president of the board of Sunbeam Family Services, vice chairman of the board of Friends of the Capitol and president of the Lambda Chi Alpha Parents Club at OU.

Carl also serves on the boards of Sunbeam Foundation, Educare and ReMerge. On behalf of the Oklahoma Center for Nonprofits, she teaches board governance in the Standards for Excellence series and conducts board trainings and retreats for other nonprofits.

Additionally, she is a member of All Souls Episcopal Church, P.E.O. and

Kappa Kappa Gamma Alumnae. In 2012, Carl was recognized by *The Journal Record* as one of "50 Making a Difference" during its Woman of the Year event.

Carl speaks in glowing terms about OMRF, where scientists are developing treatments for human diseases, including heart disease, cancer, lupus, multiple sclerosis and Alzheimer's disease. The highlights of her OMRF job, she said, are the times when she hears a donor's story or sees their eyes light up as they walk into a lab and begin to understand what a scientist is studying.

"I'm working for the greater good and there is no better feeling," Carl said. "I feel I have my finger closer to the pulse of what is going on in our community. I meet and know some of the most amazing people who have performed acts of service that blow you away. They awe me, they inspire me. Sure, I want to be adequately compensated for my work, and I work very hard, but I know I am part of something that is larger than me. I am a better citizen, a better parent and a better person because I witness sacrifice and efforts to improve the lives of others. I finally understand what it means to change the world." | **SL** |