

'Stubborn' Saint John lawyer recognized with prestigious award

MIKE LANDRY Telegraph-Journal

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Deirdre Wade, a partner with Cox and Palmer in Saint John, will receive the 2017 Franklin O. Leger, Q.C. Award. It is the highest honour given by the Law Society of New Brunswick.

Photo: Mike Landry/Telegraph-Journal

SAINT JOHN • Back in the 1980s, when Deirdre Wade was nearly finished her arts degree at University of New Brunswick Saint John and had big city dreams, her mother pressured her to stay in the province. It was a decision that ended up benefiting the province, particularly the legal community.

This month, the Law Society of New Brunswick named Wade the 2017 recipient of its most prestigious honour, the Franklin O. Leger, Q.C. Award.

The award recognizes members who have provided “outstanding meritorious service, dedication, or contribution in accordance with the highest ideals of the legal profession.”

“I’m just delighted and quite surprised,” said Wade during an interview at Cox and Palmer in Saint John, where she is a partner. “I hope people don’t think I’m finished in terms of my involvement.”

Wade said the law was her Plan B, after her mother, the late Saint John elementary school teacher Marianna Stack, urged her away from the publishing industries of Toronto and New York City.

In law school, though, Wade fell in love with the research, reading, writing and history of cases, she said. In particular, it was administrative law, involving privacy and insurance, that attracted her.

“It’s about what’s going on in government, and how administrative decisions impact individuals,” she said.

It’s this interest that has driven her career, she said, inside the courtroom and out. Her black tortoiseshell glasses perched on her head and fiddling a pen in her hands, Wade explained how she’s invested her time into the administration of the legal community.

After starting out with the Saint John Law Society, she spent two terms as counsel with the provincial law society, where she still helms the Compensation Fund committee, which oversees the reimbursement of client for financial loss due to the lawyer fraud or dishonesty of a lawyer.

Around 2000, she began working with the Canadian Bar Association, eventually becoming branch president for the province, and also contributing to its insurance branch and other committees.

She didn’t have to give up her publishing passion, either, in the end. She’s on the editorial board of a legal journal, and been involved with other publications over the years.

Shadowing her national and provincial efforts, though, is the work she’s done at her firm. In discussing her early experience as an articling student with the Office of the Ombudsman, as an aside she expresses chagrin that there wasn’t a suitable gender-neutral word instead of ombudsman. Diversity and inclusion, she said, is something she’s worked for years to embed into the administration of the firm and legal community.

Wade started Cox and Palmer’s diversity and inclusion committee. She said she wanted to make sure the firm had a policy of gender neutrality and equity for all, especially younger lawyers. Too often, she said, young female lawyers were being pigeon-holed into certain roles and not being considered for others.

She also helped set up a national women lawyers forum.

Wade notes she has few female peers who have remained in private practice after decades. Most transition out, she said.

Wade credits her husband, Paul Smith, for inspiring her to fight for equity. They graduated from law school together, she said, but he had the advantage and more opportunities just by being male as they set out on their careers.

“I was going to have a career the same as he had,” she said. “I was stubborn.”

Wade will receive her award during a reception for law society members on Friday in Saint John.

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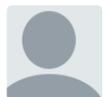
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