

Long-Term Commitment

Barbara Duffy's team caters to the needs of the senior health-care industry

In 1984, Barbara Duffy road-tripped with her sister across the country from St. Paul, Minn., to Seattle. For the first time in her life, “I saw the mountains and the [Pacific] Ocean. We drove up Highway 2, and it was just fantastic,” she says.

Five years later, with a J.D. in her pocket from the University of Minnesota, Duffy made Seattle her home.

For the long-term health-care community, however, the Pacific Northwest has long been home. “This is where a lot of assisted living [as an industry] grew up,” says Duffy, now one of the state’s most prominent commercial litigators and chair of Lane Powell’s Long Term Care and Seniors Housing Client Service Team, a regionally unique group of lawyers with expertise in a range of issues that face the industry—regulatory issues, employment, taxes, real estate, transactions, professional liability claims, fraud and white-collar crimes.

With partner Robin Dale, a former assistant attorney general, Duffy founded the service team in 2004 to better serve a growing number of clients—nursing homes, assisted-living facilities, independent-living and retirement communities.

She oversees 25 attorneys in Olympia, Portland and Seattle offices. “We speak the language of the profession, and we can really look our clients in the eye, and we understand the trends; the issues they are facing,” she says.

Duffy attends health-care association meetings and is vice chair of the American Health Lawyers Association’s long-term care practice group. She also sits on the legal subcommittee of the American Health Care Association, a leadership role that gives her

squad a national profile.

It upsets her when the bad publicity of a class-action suit casts a shadow over one of her corporate clients. A suit against Extencicare claimed the long-term care giant had misrepresented the quality of its nursing services. Duffy’s team convinced the federal court to dismiss the case.

“To have, as we did in this class-action case, allegations that they’re bad caregivers or that they’re part of a scheme to deprive the frail and elderly of the money they put toward care, is just so offensive to the rank-and-file and so demoralizing to the caregivers,” says Duffy. “To drive a stake in a case like this right out of the box is just so gratifying.”

For all the intensity of her career, Duffy manages to live a balanced life. Each year, for instance, she and her husband, Philip, a deeply steeped Northwest native, participate in the Courage Classic. The rigorous, three-day bicycle ride takes them over three mountain passes.

At work, what keeps her enthusiastic is a firm belief in the value of the industry she spends her time defending. Duffy says it’s not about big business.

“It’s about a profession,” she says, “that involves real-life people who care deeply about what they’re doing—and doing it in a very dignified fashion.”

—Adrienne Schofhauser



Caregiver

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