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WOMEN IN BUSINESS

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Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi L.L.P.

Law

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Kathleen Flynn Peterson

BY JOHN VONIHOFF JR.
STAFF WRITER

Throughout her professional career, Kathleen Flynn Peterson has always had a passion for health care.

She began her career as a registered nurse, then moved to the courtroom as a trial lawyer specializing in medical malpractice. Peterson now serves as a partner at Minneapolis-based Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi L.L.P., where she chairs the firm's medical malpractice and personal injury national practice sections. She was the first woman to serve on the firm's executive board.

Peterson first became interested in law while pursuing her nursing degree at the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul. She was still deciding between graduate and law school, when she got called for jury duty during her senior year.

That courtroom experience solidified her decision. "I just became intrigued with the courtroom process," she said. "I had the opportunity to see the lawyers and judge, and it was just something that really interested me."

She attended William Mitchell College of Law while working full time as a nurse at St. Paul-Ramsey Hospital (now Regions Hospital). She clerked in the medical malpractice area for Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi L.L.P. for a couple years during law school and accepted a position with the firm after receiving her law degree.



Peterson said she often draws on her experience as a nurse to help select which cases she will accept from the hundreds of requests she receives each month. And the two professions really aren't as different as they may appear, she said.

"You are in the role of patient advocate [as a nurse], which is exactly the role that I'm in as a legal professional," she said. "In a different environment, I'm an advocate for patients and their families who have had a situation that has arisen out of health care that has caused them difficulty."

As a young lawyer, Peterson won a difficult case involving negligence in the care

and treatment of a pregnant woman. The case resulted in a record-setting verdict for the client and a lot of attention for Peterson's legal practice.

She has gone on to a distinguished legal career, winning more than a dozen multi-million-dollar verdicts for her clients. She has received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Association of Trial Lawyers of America (ATLA) and The Honorable Ronald E. Hachey Outstanding Alumna Award from William Mitchell.

"She has tremendous reputation as a trial lawyer," ATLA CEO Jon Haber said. "She's really a fine lawyer. She's a great advocate and she cares very much about her clients." Peterson also serves as president-elect of ATLA, a trade group that represents 60,000 lawyers nationwide.

"I think Kathleen is one of these unique individuals that cares very much about defending the civil justice system, not only in her home state of Minnesota, but nation-wide," said Haber. "When it comes to speaking out, lobbying or taking an active role in legislation, she is really one of the leaders."

Peterson said she is proud to be a trial lawyer and thinks the stigma around the profession is unfair.

"Trial lawyers are people who stand on the side of the little guy in our country," she said. "Trial lawyers have done some of the things that we have not been able to do in society that have made this a better place to live."

jvomhof@bizjournals.com 1 (612) 288-2101