

LAW WEEK

COLORADO

Top Women Lawyers 2012

Meet the 10 women who make up this year's class of top women lawyers. They represent the full spectrum of Colorado's legal community: big law, small firm and public sector devotees. Each of these women were chosen not just for their body of work the past year, but in many cases for their lifelong dedication to helping others. These women represent what is best about the profession, though each has found her own path to success. | LAW WEEK PHOTO SARAH OVERBECK

Katherine Yarger

IT WAS A DREAM Katie Yarger didn't even allow to fully form in her brain. Heck, only 36 lawyers in the entire country are chosen each year to clerk for a U.S. Supreme Court justice.

"Applying to the Supreme Court and thinking you're going to get a clerkship is like walking outside and thinking you're going to get hit by lightning," she said.

Turns out, she got hit by lightning.

In June 2011, after a two-year screening process, Yarger was selected by Justice Clarence Thomas as one of his four clerks for the 2013 session. The second-year associate at Wheeler Trigg O'Donnell took a less-than-traditional path toward the position. The normal process — though it is shifting — is to graduate from law school, do one or two clerkships and then go to the high court. Yarger took the first step with two clerkships but then opted for private legal work. It has so far worked out.

For the past two years at Wheeler Trigg, Yarger has contributed to significant litigation matters. She was part of the team that in September successfully defended a Washington, D.C., hospital against a \$45 million malpractice claim. Although she was the junior member of the three-lawyer team, she was the one to cross-examine the plaintiff. She was also on the team that won a bench verdict in an Illinois case involving professional malpractice.

Come 2013, she will move on from Wheeler Trigg. Her interest in the high court's clerkship preceded her time at the Denver-area firm. She first applied in 2009 while she was clerking for Colorado Supreme Court Justice Allison Eid, who had previously clerked for Justice Thomas and



urged Yarger to apply.

"I think he's one of the most principled justices to ever grace the court," Yarger said. "He's an incredibly honorable person."

She did apply and went through multiple stages of interviews before she was summoned to D.C. in early June 2011. She first interviewed with Thomas' current clerks for two hours during which she had

to orally reason through her thoughts on unsettled areas of constitutional law. Then, it was into Thomas' chambers.

She was prepared for anything including views on substantive law. Instead, they talked about her legal history.

"He's a very warm, jovial person," she said. "He has a wonderful laugh."

The position is sure to lead to other opportunities, but Yarger isn't sure if constitutional

law is where she'll end up. She said she has enjoyed trial work and can see her career trending that way. But who knows?

"It's one of the most exciting things about being a young lawyer," she said. "I can't imagine what the future fully holds for me in terms of professional opportunities. I'd like to keep my eyes open to whatever happens." •

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