

“Ballet shoes, combat boots, and business suits”

Elisa Basnight | Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney

Elisa Basnight has gone from being a young ballet dancer in Wisconsin to a soldier for the U.S. Army and now a partner at Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney, where she represents small minority businesses and entrepreneurs. She is also a staunch advocate for U.S. veterans and young women.

“Ballet shoes, combat boots, business suits,” said Basnight. “All three of those are still in my life today.”

“Elisa’s life has always been about leading to help individuals, corporations, governments and communities maximize their potential,” said Tamika Stenbridge in nominating Basnight for the Woman of Distinction award.

Along the way she had accumulated experiences few can boast for their diversity.

During her years in the military, Basnight went to Airborne School, receiving her paratrooper airborne wings.

“It was exhilarating,” she said. “I did land in a swamp, but I didn’t break anything. Swamps are pretty soft.”

While serving in the reserves Basnight worked for a nonprofit now known as Workforce Essentials in Tennessee. There she developed a model for a career development center for downsized U.S. military helping veterans to realize their skills in the civilian sector. She is still active in veteran affairs, and has allied with HGTV for

UP CLOSE

NAME: Elisa M.T. Basnight

AGE: 40

TITLE: Partner

EMPLOYER: Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney, Philadelphia

EXPERIENCE: Debevoise & Plimpton (2002–2008); Harvard University, Zuccherman fellow (2006–2007); Council of Foreign Relations, term member (2004); Girls Action Network, founder (2002); various roles in the intelligence and financial fields dating back to 1992.

EDUCATION: U.S. Military Academy, BS in French and systems engineering (1991); military intelligence officer’s basic course, Fort Huachuca, Ariz. (1992); Boston University, overseas program in Brussels, MA in international relations (1995); Rutgers School of Law, JD (2002); Harvard University’s J.F.Kennedy School of Government, MA in public administration.

HOMETOWN: Milwaukee.

CURRENT RESIDENCE: Philadelphia



a community awareness event in Philadelphia in early November.

“Throughout my existence there’s always been an underlying public service. You can be multisector and have an impact,” said Basnight. “ABC — Always Be Connecting.”

What she has learned in one world, Basnight has taken to the others. She had noticed, for instance, a trend in young minority women, where they were lagging

behind in education and career opportunities. So in 2002, just two months before joining her first law firm in New York, Debevoise & Plimpton, Basnight formed a nonprofit she named Girls Action Now (GAN).

“Our whole vision is to help young women from underserved communities shatter stereotypes,” she said. “I like to say ‘You don’t know what you don’t know.’ Exposure to new experiences in career and

educational tracks are just so empowering to young ladies.”

With the help of her firm, which took on the cause pro bono, Basnight has been working to make a difference in the lives of young girls. GAN partners with corporate, educational and community sectors to help girls with scholarships and programs enabling them to excel in math, science and technology.

These are the areas that young women tend to shy away from, she said.

This past summer GAN made it possible for a 15-year-old girl from Newark, N.J., to spend a month at Mount Holyoke in Massachusetts.

“She had the world open up to her,” said Basnight. “She’s now trying to get into boarding school.”

Basnight sees GAN as a support group for girls. Basnight’s support group are her three F’s.

“Faith, family and friends,” she said. Those are “the three critical forces from which I get my strength.”

— Marilyn S. D’Angelo

“It’s all about good attitudes”

Kimberly J. Brumbaugh | Brumbaugh Wealth Management

On a day in mid-October, Kimberly J. Brumbaugh has a teenager at home with swine flu, a husband recovering from yet another shoulder surgery and a special-needs son to hustle onto the school bus. All this and a five-hour board meeting at her church.

“It’s all about good attitudes,” Brumbaugh said.

That and a healthy dose of indifference. In her daily life and in her work as a financial adviser, Brumbaugh strives to adopt a sort of mental distance from whatever crisis looms. “You want to remove the emotion, which is one of my gifts. I can take the emotion out of things and focus on fundamentals, to bring some perspective and really look at what is going on,” said Brumbaugh, who is founder of Brumbaugh Wealth Management Group, an office of MetLife.

Certainly this philosophy has served her well amid the financial crisis, with clients seeking reassurance and Brumbaugh delivering calm reason. In addition to her one-on-one conversations, she also holds “Coffee with Kim” sessions once a month, inviting clients to come in for a communal reality check.

UP CLOSE

NAME: Kimberly J. Brumbaugh

AGE: 40

TITLE: Founder

EMPLOYER: Brumbaugh Wealth Management Group (an office of MetLife), Exton

EXPERIENCE: Brumbaugh Consulting /Robert Norkus Associates, partner (1996–1998); Karr Barth Associates/AXA Advisors (1998–2003).

EDUCATION: Widener University, business administration (attended night school 1987–1992 while working full-time for Mercedes-Benz); American College, for licenses and designation in financial services field.

HOMETOWN: Media

CURRENT RESIDENCE: Honey Brook, Chester County



All this has helped drive the success of her firm, say those who know her well. “While inspiring those around her, Kim [has] continued to exhibit astuteness in the financial industry,” said Ellen Fisher, publisher of Women’s Yellow Pages.

If her business savvy inspires, so does her personal journey.

In 2007 her son Justin, then 8, was diagnosed with Asperger’s syndrome, a condition on the autism spectrum. After years of trying to understand what ailed the boy, Brumbaugh was relieved to finally have a diagnosis.

Others don’t take an autism diagnosis nearly as well, and Brumbaugh has strived

to provide solace and understanding through volunteer work with SPARC, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Autism Resource Center, where she has served on the board.

Without support from SPARC and similar resources, autism can take a dire toll on families, she said.

“Divorce is huge with families who feel like they can’t deal with it, like: Life is hard enough,” she said. “In cases like that, we are able to share our stories. By being very open, it maybe gets other people to be open and talking and sharing. They start to think about getting the help they need.”

Of course it’s hard: Special needs, shoulder surgery, a job in the investment sector in the midst of a financial meltdown. Can’t be easy. But Brumbaugh maintains there is always good to be found.

“We go through trials, whatever they may be, so that somewhere down the line we can share our situation and our experience with someone who has maybe lost hope. I always think there are lessons to be learned,” she said. “No matter what you do as a profession, I believe it is all about giving back.”

— Adam Stone