

MIDLOFACES - MARYANN HARTZELL

It's not often an office building's landscape can provide a sense of tranquility, yet for the CowanGates law firm on Huguenot Road, office manager and administrator Maryann Hartzell created for clients and fellow colleagues exactly that with the seasonal rose and flower garden that graces the entrance and walkway. "Actually, it's great to see them [clients] stop and smell the roses," Hartzell said. "Some will ask me if I know what a plant is and we'll go outside and talk about the flowers and the plants. They are happy and have a good experience, which when coming into a law office, you never know what it is [clients visit] and it could be something serious."

Hartzell, a native of Pennsylvania, will mark her 28 year of employment at the firm this month. She and husband Rob moved to the Richmond area when his job transferred the couple here. "I remember when I first moved here. I was very fortunate," she said.

Gardening, in general, came about mostly from Hartzell's interest in plants. "I love gardening. I don't know what I'm doing. I know the names of plants and it appeals to me," she joked.

Her position evolved over the years and she thought she was leaving the firm when the couple had their son Jonathan. However, the flexibility of the position allowed Hartzell to continue at CowanGates and eventually return when he began school. It wasn't just the landscaping at the firm that sparks Hartzell's interest, but the position's numerous responsibilities. "The diversity in this job is something I just love. I never know one day to the next. Two years ago, the day after Thanksgiving, our sign was flattened to a

crumbled pile of bricks. There was a note on the front door ... I had to go through building a new sign and it was fun. It's different and it's always interesting," Hartzell said.

Defining her position, Hartzell states it's a little bit of everything. "It's HR, marketing, financial management; when you work with a smaller firm, the role is bigger. It's multifaceted," she said.

Besides being prepared, even with her own tool box, Hartzell, and a staff of 16, support 10 lawyers, to provide clients the full-service law firm services. CowanGates is expecting two associates in the fall. For Hartzell, the staff is like a second family. "We're so supportive of one another through life's good times and bad times, I feel very blessed to have this opportunity," she said.

When she is not at the office, Hartzell enjoys several activities. She likes reading, but decided a book club didn't suit her. "I don't like to be pressured into reading. You don't have to critique the book and it's not something I want a test on," she said with a laugh.

Scrap booking is another interest that has kept Hartzell busy. "I did full books – one for each of my nephews – from birth until graduation in college. That took six months for each of them," she said.

However, it wasn't the time that seems to be the stumbling block for most who enjoy scrap booking, Hartzell noted. "Some don't know where to start, whether from a baby ... The first photo you see is how you get started," she said.



Meet Maryann Hartzell

Of course, she shines when talking about Rob, her husband of 32 years. "It was a blind date my sister and a sister of a friend of his had hooked us up on. That was it. It wasn't much longer after that we were married," she said.

The couple traveled to Napa Valley for their 25th wedding anniversary and share a love of the beach and water making numerous trips to warmer climates. "It is just so relaxing. It's our time to recharge and get away and don't have to think of anything. No phones. No deadlines. We both love the sun," she said.

Her other sunshine is grandson Joshua, 5. "The light of my life," she said.