

Sanguinetti Makes History in Springfield

In many ways, the law directly led Illinois Lieutenant Governor **Evelyn Sanguinetti ('98)** to her leadership role in the state capitol.

It began when she graduated from John Marshall in 1998 and started her career as a prosecutor. Her own experience with seeking justice prompted her to public action. Her love of the law guided her from meager beginnings to leading the Land of Lincoln.

Sanguinetti was born to teen parents in Hialeah, a Cuban community outside of Miami. Her mother, a Cuban refugee, and her father, an Ecuadorian immigrant, struggled through poverty, but pushed Sanguinetti to succeed.

"I was supposed to be a statistic," Sanguinetti said. "My mother had me when she was just 15 years old. I failed the first grade. This is why I'm so big on education. An educational opportunity saved me in life."

As a young girl, she took up piano at a community center and honed a skill that helped earn her a spot in the New World School of Arts magnet high school in Miami. She attended Florida International University, where she received a bachelor's degree in piano performance.

When she was graduating from John Marshall, the Hon. Jesse Reyes ('82) recommended that she work for then-Illinois Attorney General Jim Ryan. She worked as an Assistant Attorney General, after which she worked at Maisel & Associates, representing local governments against civil claims.

"I never thought I'd get involved in politics, I just loved public service," she said. But an accident in 2007 changed all of that. That year, Sanguinetti sued municipal and transportation agencies, including the City of Wheaton, after slipping on black ice on her way to a Metra station in Wheaton. The case eventually was settled, and Sanguinetti donated the settlement to charity.

As she was recovering from her accident, Sanguinetti was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis.

"It was a very down time for me," she said. But with the love and support of her family, she said, she adopted a "get busy living, or get busy dying" attitude. It was one thing to seek redress and accountability for her accident, but that didn't solve what she saw as the greater problem of needed change.

"It's not enough to get upset," she said. She felt compelled to become involved, thinking of a refrain she reminds the law students she teaches as an adjunct John Marshall: "Always be a servant and understand that before you can be a leader, you must be a servant."

She ran successfully for Wheaton City Council in 2011. She met Bruce Rauner at a convention of the Republican National Hispanic Assembly and later joined his ticket for the Illinois gubernatorial race. Their election places Sanguinetti in a powerful position not only to steer the state's political agenda, but also to send a strong message about the possibilities for Hispanic women in government and public service.

Sanguinetti welcomes the responsibility that she says comes with being elected the country's first Latina Lieutenant Governor. She wants to empower women and Latinos to become involved in government and contributing back to their communities.

"I'd like to be a spokesperson," she said. "These dreams are available not just to me, but to everyone. That's one of the things that attracted me to John Marshall: I did see color."

She said she plans to continue teaching at John Marshall, where her roots are strong. She credits longtime Student Affairs Administrative Assistant Marilyn Criss as a strong influence and mentor, helping her see not only the importance of her legal education, but also of serving and being an active member of community organizations. Criss helped Sanguinetti and her husband, Raymond Sanguinetti ('98), become involved in the school's Latino Law Student Association, as well as the Fair Housing Clinic.

"Law school prepared me in so many ways," she said. "John Marshall not only gave me the ability to solve problems, to multitask, but also taught me to care for my fellow man."

She tells her students and other graduates interested in government or politics to "focus on the things they swore to do, what they will swear to do, which is to represent their clients, to be custodians of the peace."

Meanwhile, she will continue emphasizing the importance of education from Springfield. "I want every child to get what I got. The sky is the limit."



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