

local life

Miami attorney Elizabeth Schwartz is honored for her activism helping gay & lesbian families.

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Family matters

Attorney Elizabeth
Schwartz chose to
work in gay and lesbian
family law to make
a difference

By ANDY ZEFFER

When Miami-based attorney Elizabeth F. Schwartz learned she was going to be honored at the Miami-Dade Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce's annual gala on March 23, she was flattered but a bit embarrassed.

After all, as a young lawyer at the age of 33, she says her career is just getting started.

One male friend advised her not to worry because at a gay event, he said, people would be less concerned about what she has done than what she will be wearing.

But modesty and joking aside, Schwartz's list of accomplishments reveals why the business group chose to honor her.

Schwartz's practice serves gay and lesbian families, a segment of the population she believes has long been underrepresented.

"It's awfully humbling to get recognized at this point in my career," Schwartz says. "But I have so much more left to do. Just recently I got a call from a guy who had been with his partner for 25 years. When the partner passed away, the family swooped in and changed the locks on the house, kicking the guy out on the street."

Schwartz says that, unfortunately, her client is more the rule than the exception: Too many long-term gay and lesbian couples who don't plan ahead, she says.

Activism in her blood

A tradition of activism runs in Schwartz's blood.

Both her parents were activists in the Jewish community, and her older sister was involved in the plight of the homeless.

When Schwartz left Florida to attend college in Philadelphia, she got politically involved in race issues and abortion rights. But at that time, she says, she

ELIZABETH SCHWARTZ

Age: 33

Birthplace: Miami Beach

Residence: Miami

Education: Undergraduate studies at the University of Pennsylvania and a law degree from the University of Miami

Partner: Lydia Martin, a reporter for the

Miami Herald

Pets: Buttercup, a dog adopted at a gay expo Interesting: Schwartz is a certified yoga

instructor.

never suspected she would one day pursue law as a profession.

"A lot of people were surprised I became a lawyer," Schwartz admits. "It is considered very establishment. I guess I was resistant to the idea at first. But I had an epiphany one day that so many people who have affected social change have done so with a law degree. And a lot of people did tell me that I'm argumentative!"

Not only did Schwartz not know that she was going to become a lawyer in college, but she hadn't come out as a lesbian then, either.

When she did come out, the news was initially difficult for her family, Schwartz says, because they did not want her to have a harder life. But acceptance came relatively quickly, she says. When Schwartz is honored, her family will attend the awards ceremony.

A busy schedule

Schwartz has been practicing law for eight years, and this is her fourth year in her own practice.

After receiving her degree, she worked with the Miami Beach firm of Crockett & Chase.

When she and the partners there went their own ways, Schwartz decided to work for herself.

She says she likes making her own schedule. And for good reason: When Schwartz is not in the office, she is busy in an impressive number of other organizations.

Schwartz is a fellow in the prestigious Miami Fellows Initiative, in which 18 emerging leaders from different parts of Miami-Dade community get to enhance their skills through a mentoring program.

She is also on the board of the Women's Community Fund, a beneficiary of Aqua Girl, which gives grants to



Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, specializes in gay and lesbian family law.

organizations in the lesbian community. Schwartz is also a big supporter of the National Center for Lesbian Rights and Lambda Legal, a national gay-rights legal group.

When not at work or with her numerous activist commitments, Schwartz tries

to fit in reading, yoga, playtime with her dog Buttercup, and quality time with her partner, Lydia Martin, a features writer for the Miami Herald.

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