

Lustgarten Works to Keep Families Out of Court

Omaha family law attorney **Christine Lustgarten, JD'93**, believes the last place divorced couples need to be is in a courtroom.

"My goal is to help parents find positive ways to parent their children from two homes," said Lustgarten, a founding partner at Dornan, Lustgarten and Troia. "And to assist them in making financial decisions that will allow both parents to be in the best position possible to succeed as a single parent."

Catherine Brooks, professor of law at Creighton, says that Lustgarten's emphasis on negotiating and mediating conflicts that arise in divorce puts the Creighton alumna at the forefront of what many academics and law professionals see as the future of divorce practice.

"One Sarpy County (Nebraska) judge considers Christine the go-to mediator," says Brooks. "The respect that Christine enjoys from both the bench and practicing bar cannot be overstated."

A Unique Path to Law School

Lustgarten entered Creighton's law school in 1989 as a non-traditional student.

"When I started law school, I was a single mother of two children, ages 10 and 11, teaching computer classes full-time at Iowa Western," a community college in Council Bluffs, Iowa, says Lustgarten. "I was looking to move from teaching into something different by the time my children graduated from high school."

Lustgarten had many strengths as a Creighton law student.

"Christine's presence in class stood out to me because of the maturity she brought to the classroom," Brooks says, "the effort she herself was expending to make the law her next career and the thoughtfulness that went into her analysis that took into account the lawyering of a case."

Lustgarten graduated from Creighton in 1993 and jumped into her law career with a zeal and passion.

"When I graduated, I knew I had made a significant investment in myself and my future," says Lustgarten. "I quit my job at IWCC (Iowa Western Community College) and said to God, 'OK, put me where you need me to be.'"

Following a Dream

Lustgarten served as a civil deputy attorney at the Douglas County Attorney's Office and from 1999 to 2006 was the chief civil deputy of the civil division. In that position, she had an opportunity to argue cases before the Nebraska Supreme Court, litigate employment and prisoner cases in federal district court, and serve as counsel to elected officials in Douglas County.

In 1996, she and Stu Dornan founded Dornan, Lustgarten and Troia in Omaha. Their mission is to balance the practice of law with a commitment to their faith and families.

Lustgarten is certified in family mediation and collaborative law, and taught courses at the Concord Mediation Center titled What About the Children and Reach Beyond Conflict. The classes are required for all parents going through divorce



Christine Lustgarten, JD'93, is a family law attorney in Omaha.

or custody battles. Teaching those courses flamed her interest in family law.

Lustgarten is active with Nebraska Collaborative Divorce, an organization dedicated to promoting a "dignified and respectful alternative to the traditional adversarial process" in family law. She is a member of both the International Academy of Collaborative Professionals and the Nebraska Academy of Collaborative Professionals and has worked with the Mexican Consulate to reunite families separated by deportation or status issues.

A Model in the Classroom

Lustgarten has been a guest lecturer in Brooks' Family Law Practice and Marriage and Divorce courses.

"In the classroom, Christine shows patience in answering students' questions and supporting the questioner," Brooks says. "The care that she gives her past clients' cases models for my students the real need to observe confidentiality, to practice with the clients' interests foremost, and still to reflect on and teach from life experience in a way that benefits my students and, perhaps, the future practice of divorce law."

Lustgarten says the Creighton law school fosters a spirit of community and emphasizes the importance of giving back.

According to Brooks, Lustgarten's career — from student to esteemed mediator and collaborative lawyer — reflects qualities essential to the Jesuit formation of the whole person.

"Her path has been one in which Creighton has been fortunate to participate and support," Brooks says. "The practice of law in Omaha has been improved because of Christine Lustgarten's life of true service to and on behalf of others through the law."