
Go West

*Western Kansas charms alumni
with opportunity, way of life.*



The world is wide in western Kansas, where clear, country roads stretch on for miles, disappearing into the horizon. Family homesteads boast generous borders in every direction, and life feels slower and simpler.

There seems to be plenty of just about everything out west — space to move, room to breathe, hours to enjoy. Another thing that's in good supply: opportunity.

Lawyers are prized commodities in these parts, embraced by locals and deeply needed by almost every town dotting the map. This gives our graduates leeway to savor time with family, practice any (or *every*) type of law, and put dreams in motion without delay.

It's not just happening in western Kansas. Rural attorneys are in huge demand statewide, and Washburn Law has long done all it can to help meet that need. From its oil and gas programs to its agricultural studies, 1,084 graduates have set up shop in rural Kansas, and a recent initiative is looking to push those numbers even higher.

Starting in 2013, the Professional Development Office joined forces with the Southwest Kansas Bar Association, sending

students to the association's annual meeting in Dodge City each fall so they can see firsthand the phenomenal life and work opportunities that await them.

Meet three Washburn Law alumni who picked up and headed west, making beautiful — and bountiful — lives for themselves.

On the road

Just shy of 10 years ago, **Eric Harman, '05**, by all accounts, had made it. He'd scored a plum contract doing real estate law with a large firm in Washington, D.C., one block north of the White House. Catered lunches, limo rides home, 12 billable hours a day — it was all part of the package.

"At first, it was great, because the money was good. But I didn't have any client interaction. I wasn't digging really deeply into any real estate documents," he said.

"I'd wake up before my kids went to school, and I'd get home when they were in bed. And I just thought, 'The money's good, but it's not worth it.'"

Harman was no stranger to moving — having lived 19 places

in his first 19 years — and he had a law school buddy who had found fast success in southwest Kansas. Intrigued, and fed up with the grind, he and his wife packed up their family in August 2012, and set out for Dodge City. Sight unseen.

In the four years since, Harman has gladly traded long days and gridlock for fresh air and open road. His office? That would be his car, shuttling him to county seats for 60 miles around. His conference room? Courthouses and clients' porches.

It's made for a viable, and downright innovative, business model — one that comfortably supports his six kids, ages 1 to 19. Relying solely on court appointments, Harman declared, "It's a gold mine out here."

Along with the healthy workload, his new field provides a meaning that was missing before.

"Clients in D.C. are very business-oriented, very serious. Not that the clients I meet with here don't have serious issues, but we can find a way to relate to each other," he said of his criminal and juvenile defense clients. "In the end, I'm their attorney, but I'm also friends with them. They've made mistakes, and I try to help them through that."

For Harman, there's clearly more *life* to be had in Dodge as well — a spot on the Ford County Zoning Board and peace of mind when leaving the kids home on date night. Plus a stately 1925 house that "would be a lot of money" anywhere near D.C.

Thanks to perks like these, this perennial mover has finally found his place.

"The kids like that they see me more than they did when we lived in Virginia. I go to their ball games. I see them at lunch. They like getting their dad in their life again."

A strong start

Coleman Younger, '15, hadn't so much as laid eyes on southwest Kansas before his first trip with Washburn Law during his 2L year. The Frankfort native was pretty well set on agribusiness and has always been partial to country living. But when it came to the prospect of moving to western Kansas, he was skeptical at best.

Then a funny thing happened. He actually *visited* the area for the Southwest Kansas Bar Association annual meeting in 2013, and he loved it.

"When I got down here — I mean, my God — they fed us steak and prime rib. They took care of us," Younger said.



Eric Harman, '05



Coleman Younger, '15

“It seemed like a really positive, good environment, especially for young attorneys. And I will wave all the flags and send out all the vouchers for that. That is absolutely, 100 percent what it’s been for me.”

Not only does Younger rave about “the people, the camaraderie, the way that everyone — and I mean *everyone* — is helpful.” But he’s also landed some big business right out of the gate. As an associate attorney at Brollier Wolf & Kuharic in Hugoton, he’s already representing a nationwide ag company, just one year in.

“I’m not sitting in a closet doing research for someone at a set salary for the next 10 years. I’m already out doing trials, visiting clients,” he said, crediting boss **Jim Kuharic, ’76**. “I have a lot, lot, lot more independence professionally than I would if I didn’t live here. And that is beyond refreshing.”

The accessibility has also been a welcome surprise.

“Everything’s here,” Younger said, noting that Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Colorado are all within a couple hours’ drive, putting skiing, shopping, and other adventures in reach. Including hockey, believe it or not. A longtime devotee of the sport, he was afraid he’d have to abandon it after the move. Instead, he’s found his way onto a traveling team in Garden City, and the coaching staff of two youth teams in Dodge City.

Younger’s message for alumni considering the region: There is money to be made and an even richer life to be lived. The word seems to be getting out, too. In the next year, three more Washburn lawyers are headed to Hugoton alone.

“My first trip, I was actively looking for an excuse not to come — and I never found it. And I’m so glad I didn’t,” he said, adding he’s “absolutely” in it for the long haul.

“I have every opportunity — more opportunities, honestly, than I think I would at a big firm wherever. It felt like home.”

Going home

Despite growing up in Cimarron, **Megan McCann, ’08**, couldn’t have predicted she’d return to that neck of the woods one day. But in 2010, when the up-and-comer drew an offer more than *doubling* her salary, let’s just say it got her attention. So with her young family in tow, McCann left Manhattan, Kansas, behind



Megan McCann, '08

and followed that opportunity all the way back home.

Based in Dodge City, her all-female firm has been a godsend. The hours were chosen with school schedules in mind, and there’s minimal travel required. Ideal for this mom of two.

“Life, in and of itself, slows down out here in comparison to other places, which I personally kind of like,” McCann said.

“As a young attorney, if you don’t want to go to a firm where you’re nothing more than a workhorse and you work those 80-, 90-hour-plus weeks, then yeah, this is a good option. I can be home in time to make dinner and have the evening with my kids to play, and give them baths, and all that kind of stuff.”

A slower pace doesn’t mean a stalled career, though. Rural living can be a fast track of sorts, opening doors that might be sealed shut in larger markets. There’s a chance — a need, really — for rising attorneys to step up. Which is precisely what she did, becoming name partner in Davis & McCann, P.A., by age 29.

Helping mainly farm families, her estate planning work often



looks nothing like that of her urban counterparts. For one thing, she still has “a lot of clients who do things on handshakes.” For another, when you’re talking family homesteads rather than stocks and bonds, it’s more than business. It’s personal, too.

“We deal with death on a regular basis. But ultimately, I think it’s pretty rewarding, because you can help make somebody feel more comfortable and like, ‘OK, I’ve got that taken care of. I’ve done everything I can do.’”

The entire family has settled in nicely, McCann said, praising the region’s small-town feel, strong schools, and outdoor pursuits. She and her husband are even gutting “a great big old two-story with a wraparound porch” — cementing this land as home once more.

“As far as a place to raise a family, it is absolutely wonderful for that. There are a lot of great opportunities that people just haven’t considered because they don’t consider the area.” As for McCann, with her 10-acre piece of the good life, *she’s* not considering anywhere else. “We’re planning on staying put.”

Program Ushers Students Out West

There’s no bigger champion for western Kansas than **David Rebein, BA '77**. A southwest Kansan born and raised, Rebein jokes that he “made it a total of 13 miles” from his childhood home — having practiced at Rebein Bangerter Rebein PA in Dodge City since 1980.

“I thought the area would have some pretty incredible opportunities,” he said, “and it turned out that it did.”

For the past three years, Rebein and the Southwest Kansas Bar Association have teamed up with Washburn Law’s Professional Development Office to let future graduates in on the secret. Each fall, students attend the association’s annual meeting in Dodge City, with the group footing the bill.

The event is part job fair, part celebration — complete with a kickoff party, interviews, and 100-plus regional lawyers. Students are paired with host attorneys, giving them the inside story on living, practicing, and raising a family in southwest Kansas.

“Washburn Law’s just been fantastic. What we do is try to get both Washburn Law and KU Law students to come out, and just see a little bit of what it might be like here,” said Rebein, whose efforts earned him Honorary Life Membership in the Washburn University School of Law Alumni Association in 2015.

“I think it’s going to become the most important thing that we do as a bar association. Because this is what’s going to make these communities, good community leaders.”

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