

Alumni Fellow

Alumni Fellow Haag's legal career runs the gamut.

By Shalyn Murphy, BA '09



Photo by Doug Stremel

As general counsel and executive vice president of Capitol Federal Savings Bank, **Natalie Haag, '85**, fields questions involving securities law, banking regulations, and human resources on a daily basis. With 700 employees and more than 40 locations in Kansas and Missouri, the bank draws upon her experience in both government and private sector law while offering Haag, a self-declared learning addict, an ever-growing list of topics to study. And the job seems to be a perfect fit, though Haag's original career aspirations involved higher office.

As a teenager watching the Watergate hearings unfold, Haag paid special attention to the president's general counsel and saw the country needed hard-working, honest women in government. She decided she would obtain a law degree and work her way to becoming the first female president of the United States. But as she moved from undergraduate to law school, negative headlines regarding the Iran-Contra scandal made her reconsider her career aspiration.

"The more I learned about politics, I wondered who in their right mind would want to be president of the United States," Haag said. "But by that time, I was enamored with the practice of law. So in a way, the politicians talked me into law and out of the oval office."

Before tackling the banking industry, Haag's career ran the gamut from legislative, governmental affairs, corporate, constitutional, civil litigation, and criminal prosecution with a nine-year stint at Security Benefit Corporation, seven years in government for the State of Kansas, and 10 years practicing law in Topeka, Wichita, and Cowley County.

At Security Benefit, Haag honed her love of governmental affairs and mastered many complex areas of business law as the second vice president, director of governmental affairs and assistant general counsel, but she points to her time serving as general counsel to former Kansas Gov. Bill Graves as a pivotal moment in her career. The position gave Haag the opportunity to broaden her perspective on the real world application of law while serving as

the governor's appointee on varied committees regarding emergency response, Native American relations, payment center oversight, and school safety.

"That was the first time I recognized that my law degree was worth more than simply the practice of law. It was a degree in thinking, applying logic, and seeing solutions in everything," Haag said.

Through all her career moves, Haag looked for opportunities that would allow the flexibility a family requires. Haag and her husband, Ken Metz, have logged many hours in support of their kids, Maggie Metz, 23, and Zeke Metz, 16, at swim meets, 4-H events, and school functions over the years.

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Haag recently completed a term as Kansas Bar Association president, where she relished the opportunity to connect with lawyers across the state while attending local bar association meetings. She experienced a particularly meaningful milestone during a recent meeting of the Wichita Bar Association.

"For the first time in my history as a lawyer, everyone at the head table — officers, national, state, and local — were all women. It was very exciting to realize we had reached that stage," Haag said.

Haag credits her parents, dairy farmers in Holton, for instilling in her the ability to work hard and the duty to serve her community. Those traits become apparent through the way she dedicates her time and efforts in groups like the Kansas Bar Association, Supreme Court Nominating Commission, Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence, Kansas Humanities Council, Topeka Chamber of Commerce, Topeka

Bar Association, and the Missouri Valley Swimming LSC among many others.

Following her passions, Haag has spent most of the last 20 years on the KBA legislative committee and the KBA diversity committee, working to ensure Kansas remains a good place to practice law and the courts adequately reflect the people they serve.

"I've been very active in bar associations because the law has given me a wonderful occupation and great opportunities," Haag said. "It's about promoting our third branch of government and protecting the rights and independence of our bar. I want to give back to the bar that has given me so much."

Haag's efforts have been recognized by her peers and colleagues with the YWCA Woman of Excellence Award in 2016, the Topeka Bar Association Newton Vickers Professionalism Award in 2013, the Kansas Bar Association Outstanding Service Award in 2008, and the Security Benefit Living the Values Community Service Award in 2007.

After earning a bachelor of science degree at Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kan., enrolling at Washburn University School of Law seemed like the natural choice, though Haag said she was so intimidated by the professors she was too scared to speak up in class for the first year. Going from intimidated student to alumni fellow was unexpected for Haag.

"This recognition actually stunned me," said Haag. "Washburn Law has so many outstanding alums that I have always felt like just one of the average graduates. To be honored in this way is quite humbling because I didn't do anything extraordinary. With such a solid educational foundation, it was easy to enjoy a variety of employment opportunities. It is a great honor to be recognized for just using my good education to do things I enjoy in both my profession and my community."

Looking back at her time at Washburn Law fondly, Haag is eager to offer advice and encouragement to current law students.

"Raise your hand and ask questions. Stop thinking that a law degree qualifies you for a single job. Law school will teach you the most important skill in the world — how to think — while building your business, management, and organizational skills. You will have many opportunities, so look broadly."