

By Denise D. Couling

# Lori A. Buiteweg, Chair of the Representative Assembly

**T**rust a child to tell it like it is. My nine-year-old son, J.P., was asked at a church event to name his guardian angel. (No matter how much faith you have in your child, waiting for the answer to an impromptu question like that seems to take an eternity.) Wise beyond his years, J.P.'s response couldn't have rung more true. "Aunt Lori," he answered with perfect confidence.

J.P.'s well-placed faith in Lori Buiteweg is only natural. Lori can be counted upon, at any time and on every level, to be a guardian and protector, an intelligent and reasoned decision-maker, and to treat others with respect, dignity, open-mindedness, and generosity of spirit. The State Bar of Michigan will benefit from Lori's approach as she assumes her role as chair of the Representative Assembly.

I have known Lori since high school and my respect for her continues to grow with every year. Lori will undoubtedly be embarrassed by the "slightly" effusive tone of this piece, but toning down my appreciation for her as a balanced, wise, and grounded individual would fail to capture the level of admiration that she inspires in so many friends and colleagues alike. It is no overstatement to say it is an honor to count her as a close friend. Lori's uncanny ability to prioritize results in clients' matters and public service projects is woven into the fabric of her life. Every person and every issue receives the care, energy, and attention they deserve while Lori maintains a wholesome and positive approach to tackling any issue.

Lori is a graduate of the University of Michigan and Wayne State University Law School. She is presently a partner in the family law/mediation firm of Nichols, Sacks, Slank, Sendelbach & Buiteweg with offices in Ann Arbor and Brighton. Lori is a founding board



Lori A. Buiteweg

member of the Washtenaw County–Eastern Michigan University Legal Resource Center, a recently founded non-profit organization with a mission of increasing access to justice in Washtenaw County. She is a past president of the Washtenaw County Bar Association and has served as the chairperson of that county's Family Law Section.

Although Lori can list these and many more legal and public service achievements in her career, describing only her career would paint an incomplete picture of her. Lori's true hallmark is the balanced and thoughtful approach she brings to every aspect of her life. Lori is a delightful person who exudes genuine warmth, joie de vivre, and an overriding love for her family and friends. She is an ever-ready hostess and phenomenal cook—from the hearty Italian cuisine on which she was raised to the most delicious, health-conscious meals worthy of a national magazine cover. Lori artfully balances living a full and gen-

uine personal life and achieving excellence in her legal practice and public service work. That is her secret to success in both. In a world where authenticity is often missing or feigned, Lori is the "real deal." She is certain to approach her newest role as chair of the Representative Assembly with the same integrity and style she exhibits in every other aspect of her life.

Lori has two lovely sons, Michael, age 10 and Joseph, age 8 (both of whom would squawk at hearing themselves called "lovely"). Michael has earned and Joey is about to earn the degree of black belt in the martial arts. Michael and Joey also participate in music and other sports activities while attending elementary school in Ann Arbor. None of these activities would be possible without the tremendous support of their devoted mother. Lori's husband, Tom Buiteweg, is a consumer finance attorney with GMAC in Detroit. Tom is also a marathon runner (including two trips to the Boston Marathon) and a computer aficionado (a/k/a "computer geek"). These hobbies seem destined to earn Lori the most-patient-spouse-of-the-century award.

The Buitewegs are active members of St. Francis parish in Ann Arbor and seem to be the glue that helps bind a diverse array of friends in their Ann Arbor neighborhood. On most weekends, the Buitewegs can be found enjoying the company of friends and/or family, with Lori frequently acting as the confident hostess ensuring that everyone has plenty to eat. Lori's parents, Jack and Ann Lafret of Grand Blanc, have much pride in Lori and her sister, Melissa Zamora, an engineer who also resides in Ann Arbor with her husband, Andy and Lori's adored niece, Emily Jo.

Lori is one of those "connectors" who brings out people's common interests and helps form a community from a collection of individuals. She builds bridges and friendships



*Lori A. Buiteweg and family*

between others as naturally and effortlessly as most of us breathe. The people in Lori's life are better for having known her and they know it.

With her assuming the chair of the Representative Assembly, Lori's natural gifts for listening, connecting with others, and building alliances will be at work once again, and we are all the better for it. The balanced leadership, warmth, and intelligence that are the cornerstones of the "Lori Approach" certainly will enrich the State Bar and the practice of law in Michigan. ♦

*Denise Couling is an attorney, jewelry boutique business owner, wife, and mother of two elementary school-age boys. She practices real property law in Brighton.*