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*Law Bulletin photo by Paul McGrath*

Attorney Corri D. Fetman founded Chicago Women at Law Ltd. in her kitchen, but now her seven-person law office is in the loop.

## No manpower necessary; woman leads female firm

By KATE SCHOTT  
Law Bulletin staff writer

The first thing that catches the eye in Corri D. Fetman's law office is the leopard print chairs.

Then it's the veteran lawyer's long red nails and nontraditional outfits, which she is known for wearing in the courtroom.

"The accents you see in the firm are mine," she says. "The leopard chairs are mine. This is who I am."

What's striking about Fetman is more than her looks and style—she has a no-nonsense attitude coupled with pride and honesty.

She'll tell the story of her life—how she was physically and verbally abused by her alcoholic father, despised by her valium-addicted mother, sexually harassed by a former supervising attorney and hindered in job after job by male partners in law firms.

So in May of 1995 she opened a firm of her own.

Chicago Women at Law Ltd. began as a one-woman show in Fetman's kitchen. After years of renting and sharing office space, she bought an office condo last

year at 33 W. Jackson Blvd.

"The name [of the firm] is about a celebration of the challenges I went through in the corporate world, as a young adult and as a child," she said. "I had to think about what I wanted and what I didn't want."

What she didn't want was male employees.

What she did want was upbeat female attorneys, a relaxed atmosphere and a flexible schedule for employees with children.

Fetman has a staff of six—three attorneys and three legal support employees.

"It's not perfect," she said, "but I wanted a place where I would want to go to work each day."

The firm concentrates in family law—mostly divorce, child custody, and prenuptial and postnuptial agreements.

And although Fetman has no male attorneys, men, ironically, make up about 70 percent of the firm's clientele.

"That's because they want a strong female ... and they want to equalize their position in court if their

wife hired a woman [attorney]," Fetman said.

She describes her law firm's philosophy as "tenacious, prepared and aggressive if we need to be."

Cook County Circuit Judge Gay-Lloyd Lott can testify to that.

He said he's amazed by the research Fetman does for her cases.

"I give her very high marks," he said. "She looks like she'd be a glamour girl or something" but the combination of having a "spiffy appearance" and a hard work ethic gives her great confidence.

Lott recently appointed Fetman to represent in court neglected and abused children.

"That work I take extremely seriously and will do whatever it takes for the children I represent," Fetman said.

It's the most important work she does, she said, because at one time she was one of those children.

Fetman, 38, grew up in north suburban Lincolnwood, where she was often called "stupid" and "worthless" by her parents, she said.

School became her escape and she found role models at after-school jobs.

"I just had this inner strength," she said. "I decided [at an early age] that I never wanted to be dependent on a man."

When her parents told her she'd never get into

college, she proved them wrong.

Fetman received partial scholarships to both undergraduate and law programs at DePaul University, and put herself through school by working more than 40 hours a week while attending classes.

"I'm of the defiant personality that when someone tells me that I can't do it, the more I want to do it," she said.

After law school, she worked at a few law firms gaining valuable experience but she said she always felt impeded by the men in the offices. They made more money and were promoted more often than female attorneys, she said.

At one job, she said, she was harassed by a supervising attorney who allegedly had two prior harassment charges against him.

She left the job for another firm, refusing to change her tough attitude or what she calls her "outrageous" outfits. She often wears animal print suits and fish net stockings to court.

"I have a survival mentality," she said. "I'll do whatever it takes."

Since graduating from law school in 1988, Fetman is still working seven days a week, carrying a high case load and paying off her student loans. She said her \$5,000 balance will be paid before the end of the year.

She's never been happier, though.

"I thank God everyday," she said. "I really do."