First female lawyer in LaSalle Co. welcomes granddaughter into practice

A recent law school graduate kicked off the New Year with her grandmother, the first female attorney in LaSalle County, expanding an Ottawa-based law firm.

Kathryn Baker, who graduated from Northern Illinois College of Law and passed the Illinois State Bar in October, said she's excited to launch Barton & Baker with her “fiery” grandmother Marilyn Barton, the first woman to practice law in Ottawa more than 40 years ago.

"Kate’s the only one of six grandkids I could talk into law,” Barton said with a laugh. "I'm proud she'll carry on the tradition, and I'm thrilled to start 2015 practicing law alongside my granddaughter."

Barton started practicing law back in 1970, after serving as a Chicago Public School teacher for more than a decade. She said she likes the idea of adding her granddaughter into her long-standing practice because, with similar strong personalities, the two make a good team.

Baker, who interned at Prairie State Legal Services in 2013 helping low-income clients, had initially sworn off becoming a lawyer in lieu of becoming a counselor. After being the youngest to graduate in her class at Bradley University with B.S. degrees in both Psychology and Sociology, Baker spent three years as a caseworker at the Illinois Institute for Addiction Recovery at Proctor Hospital in Peoria.

But Baker changed her mind about law when she realized how pivotal and active a role counseling could take in helping clients navigate through legal cases, especially divorce.
"Clients come in dealing with the worst break up of their life," Baker said. "They have to adjust to dividing their property, sometimes their children. When I realized how much family law involved counseling, I saw a way to connect with people and help them in a different way."

Barton & Baker, a law firm based in a log cabin office in Ottawa, provides personalized legal assistance in family law, bankruptcy, traffic law, criminal law, and workers' compensation law.

"We're all about helping the community with better service and a personal approach," Barton said. "We care about our clients: They are more than just a case number to us. And with Kate on board, we can provide greater help to the people in our community."