

# LAW WEEK COLORADO

## TOP WOMEN

BY JULIA CARDI  
LAW WEEK COLORADO

As Crystal McDonough's reputation has grown, her willingness to fight hard for her clients has earned her the nickname the "little bulldog." She doesn't buy the notion that women aren't suited to certain practice areas like litigation, because she's never cared what people think, even at the times when she's been the only woman in the room.

"I think it's really fun," said McDonough, who practices in energy and natural resources and business law. "I love the complex nature of litigation and the strategy. And I think women make excellent attorneys in complex issues."

She has rare experience in applying the Public Utility Regulatory Policies Act to cases, a law passed in the 1970s to promote renewable energy sources. The law is specific and difficult to understand, she said, but has seen a resurgence in use in the past several years as attention to renewable energy has grown again.

McDonough's catalogue of expertise has come from her colorful background. Law practice is a second career for her after she owned small businesses for several years. And she holds a master's degree in energy and natural resources, which she said has given her a depth of working industry knowledge that makes her stand out. For one of her degree classes, she visited sites for every type of energy production in Wyoming.

"When my clients sit down with me and we have a discussion for their consultation, they walk away going, 'Wow, she knows what she's talking about. She understands it.'" The Nebraska ranch her family owned while she was growing up has also helped her understand issues surrounding land, mineral ownership and oil and

gas development, she said.

Based in Loveland, McDonough practiced solo for several years, but in the past several months she has brought on an associate and an of counsel, with a goal of having five attorneys at her eponymous firm by 2020. McDonough is also finalizing plans to open offices in Denver and Cheyenne, Wyoming, within the next few months.

Practicing in Loveland is unique, she said, because of how quickly Northern Colorado is growing as a whole, and the growth of her firm's work with business clients seems to mirror that. By contrast, her energy practice is heavily concentrated in Denver and Cheyenne.

But she said, the business and energy and natural resources practices do go well together because so many

issues related to energy and oil and gas involve contracts.

"Oil and gas leases? It's a contract," she said. "If you don't understand contracts, if you don't understand contract disputes, how are you going to be able to resolve those issues for your clients?"

In addition to McDonough's knowledge of business law, her experience working in the small-business world has also given her a measure of compassion for owners.

"They just want to get to work and put their people to work and pay their bills," she said. "I understand the issues that they face every day. So I think that on a personal level I can relate to my clients."

McDonough said her firm's recent growth snuck up on her. She had been

working an unsustainable pace of 12 or 14 hours a day, seven days a week.

"You've been building a practice for several years, and all of a sudden you look around and you [realize], 'I'm not building anymore, I have a practice.'"

She drew from her own background of finding a distinctive path in solo practice to give advice to women in law looking to attain high-level positions, because she said she hadn't wanted to try working her way up in the profession from the bottom.

"We don't need to follow what has traditionally been the path for any person, whether it's men or women," McDonough said. "I think we need to find out what we want to do, how we want to do it, and go after it. And not wait on somebody else to affirm that decision." •

— Julia Cardi, JCardi@circuitmedia.com

### CRYSTAL MCDONOUGH

McDonough Law

**PRACTICE:** Energy & natural resources, business

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