



Linda Perez Clark

PARTNER, KEAN MILLER; CO-OWNER, THE GRAPE AT PERKINS ROWE

Being too comfortable makes Linda Perez Clark uncomfortable.

Law, for instance: Clark is a partner with Kean Miller, a firm she joined in 2000. For the past eight years or so, Clark has done business transactional work. In more recent years, though, oil and gas work has beckoned. So Clark has started pushing it as a new practice area—complete with the requisite learning curve.

When something stops being challenging enough, she gets antsy.

“I’m always looking for something else,” Clark says. “It’s a good thing I’ve recognized that about myself. It has nothing to do with where I’m working or who I’m with. It is a matter of I get to a point where I have to do something different. Fortunately the law is broad and the opportunities are broad, and there are different niches.”

One of those niches is the Kean Miller Connection, the firm’s effort to boost diversity by

turning college sophomores and juniors on to law as a potential career. It’s hard work, yet fulfilling—and it’s another creative outlet for Clark, who’s busy planning the next phase of the project, which may involve “drilling down” to the high school level.

“I think it’s an easy agenda to push forward right now because there’s so much buy-in in the business community,” she says. “The time is right.”

About four years ago, Clark decided she needed more risk in her life. She and her husband, Kelwin, leapt into a franchise opportunity: The Grape, a wine bar concept from Atlanta. Clark had waited tables growing up and loved “the restaurant scene” and its prospect of making new relationships every day.

It turned out to be harder than it looked, so the Clarks decided to take on friend and former Avoyelles owner Brian Dykes, first as a manager, then as a partner. Clark says it was the smartest decision they could have made. The Grape opened in Perkins Rowe April 13 to rave reviews—beating the company’s 17 other stores

in sales each week it’s been open. The Clarks’ Grape is the only one in Louisiana.

“We are astounded by the positive feedback,” she says. “We’re having a ball.”

Clark says her drive probably came from her mother, a lifelong nurse who instilled in Clark and her sister a serious work ethic during the tough years growing up poor in Lake Charles. Clark was too embarrassed to talk about her humble beginnings for years. Today she sees it as an asset.

“Now that I’m finally over the struggle of it and trying to compensate for it, there’s no doubt that I am who I am because of it,” Clark says. “No doubt. I think it has served its purpose and I’m kind of over it.”

It also gives her another way to reach young people who might consider a career in law beyond their reach.

“You can grow up on welfare and you can sit at this desk,” Clark says. “There is no barrier.”

—Steve Clark

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