

# Finding Connections: Mary Vandenack Bridges Wellness and Law

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Mary E. Vandenack, CEO and founding partner of Vandenack Weaver Truhlsen. (photography by Debra S. Kaplan)

MARY E. VANDENACK

**COVER story**

**Some people know Mary E. Vandenack because of her expertise as CEO and founding partner of Vandenack Weaver**

**Truhlsen**, a law firm that specializes in tax, trust and estates, and business. Others know her for her expertise in mind/body areas of fitness and wellness; she is Yoga Alliance RYT-200 and ACE-certified, Power Pilates-certified, and earned a Specialization in Foundation of Positive Psychology from the University of Pennsylvania. And now she's pursuing professional counseling credentials. These passions may look disparate on the surface, but Vandenack sees connectedness.

"I've always made jokes about the fact that I should have a counseling degree, because in trust and estate work we're dealing with family, death, money, taxes; it's pretty personal," she said, adding that helping people is at the core of everything. "I like to use 'well-being' versus 'wellness,' because I think 'well-being' reflects the whole person whereas 'wellness,' people think it's just about health."

Vandenack's affinity for both law and well-being initially led her to pursue them as separate interests, but over time she's found increasing overlap, such as teaching mindfulness or yoga sessions at legal conferences. She's written two columns for metroMAGAZINE (a sister publication of Midlands Business Journal) for years: "Planning Matters," featuring legal content with Vandenack Weaver Truhlsen; and "metroSPIRIT," focused on well-being. More recently, the law firm added life care planning to its services.

"We actually have care managers who are health care professionals who help clients connect the dots between their estate plans and their actual health care needs," she explained, adding that this comes into play when clients are creating a trust and will and power of attorney for health care is discussed. "We have a process that we do for clients that involves reviewing their, what we call, incapacity planning. The trust and will apply when you're dead, right? But most people care a little bit more about 'if I'm still alive, but I'm really sick,' or 'if I get Alzheimer's.'"

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- MARY E. VANDENACK, CEO AND FOUNDING PARTNER,  
VANDENACK WEAVER TRUHLSEN

For instance, if a client is aging and wants to designate an assisted living facility for later, a care manager can assist with that planning, Vandenack said. Or if a client has no immediate family, a care manager that individual find a recuperation facility to recover from surgery.

“We help them find what they need to take care of their health care or their financial [concerns]. So, we have relationships with trust departments and accountants who can step in and help them if they get to where they can't do things on their own,” Vandenack said. “We're still primarily a law firm, but we're really passionate about aging, and the baby boomer population is aging ... And another thing we've been fairly involved with in recent years is support of veterans and trying to provide more veteran services.”

Vandenack's firm has always supported nonprofits like American Cancer Society and American Heart Association. This work helped introduce Vandenack to the concept of life care services and familiarized her with other health-related support to which the firm's attorneys can refer clients.

“We kind of keep an inventory of services in the community,” Vandenack said.

The Vandenack Weaver Truhlsen team is also looking at ways to broaden its reach even further.

“We feel like we’re really connecting the dots between the legal world and the health care world by having something in between that helps people,” she said. “We actually want to take that national, so we’ve been working for the last two years on developing a national affiliation of attorneys — who are like-minded and have similar skills — who are going to offer a high level of service and quality to clients, but also add the life care planning and some expanded tech services to reach more customers.”

This includes the imminent launch of an online estate planning tool to make those services more accessible and affordable, especially to unmarried women and other underserved groups, Vandenack said.

Well-being extends to the law firm’s culture, too, Vandenack said, and she strives to cultivate a positive atmosphere for everyone.

“It’s hugely important to set an example for them, whether it’s men or women, on what I call well-being, because there’s a high rate of burnout in this profession ... well-being is one of our core values here at the firm,” she said. “I like people to find the joy in it that I have ... I really do love what I do ... I really feel that I helped a lot of people with what I do. But if I don’t take care of myself, first and foremost, I can’t help my clients. And I can’t help others that work for me.”

She added, “I was so blessed to find a career that I’m passionate about, where I feel like I really do make a difference. I guess not everybody has that. But if I were to be able to give everyone a gift, it would be to have a career that they’re as passionate about as me.”

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