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Central PA

Maria Cognetti, Owner, Cognetti & Associates and the national president of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers: 3-minute interview

By [Daniel Urie](#) | [PennLive.com](#)

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Maria Cognetti, owner, [Cognetti & Associates](#), Camp Hill and the national president of the [American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers](#).

Q: Tell us about Cognetti & Associates.

A: We are a three attorney law firm practicing solely Family Law. I have over 35 years' experience in doing only Family Law. Our practice covers all of the various counties in central PA from Franklin County up to Centre County and Lackawanna County. We do all of the usual types of Family Law cases with an emphasis on divorce, custody and support. We emphasize client service. I try to teach my younger attorneys that it is imperative to care about your clients. I believe that we have an exceptional reputation for our commitment to the practice, to our ethical standards and to hard work.



Maria Cognetti

Q: Tell us about the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers (AAML).

A: The AAML is comprised of the top 1,600 matrimonial attorneys throughout the nation. What I really like about our membership requirements is that you not only have to be a top notch trial attorney but you also have to be a leader in your field. In essence, you have to demonstrate that you have given back to the practice of Family Law. I believe that's where we really stand out. Overall, I know that if I look in the Academy's directory to find an attorney in a particular geographic area where I might not personally know someone, I am very confident that the referral will do me proud. And

on a personal level, many of these folks from across the country are individuals with whom I may not have one thing in common but who I am very proud to call my friends.

Q: What made you decide to become a lawyer?

A: My parents. They did not have the opportunity to attend college and therefore were very focused on making sure that my brother and I had whatever education we needed to succeed. Even though they did not have college degrees themselves, they also really helped us understand that it was important to go on and get a higher degree such as in medicine or law. I followed in my brother's footsteps who is also an attorney and now a Judge in upstate New York.

Q: Tell us one thing that has evolved about your leadership style.

A: As I got closer to becoming the President of the AAML my leadership style really had to change. This group was the largest and clearly most diverse that I have ever had the opportunity to lead. We come from all types of practices, all different geographic areas, all different types of political backgrounds and all different personal upbringings that we bring to the table. Being a pretty head strong person I quickly realized that I needed to be very tolerant and respectful of the views of not only my executive committee but our membership as a whole. This has consequently changed my thinking on some issues and has broadened my knowledge in many things not strictly of a Family Law nature.

Q: What advice would you give to a young person who is considering a career as an attorney?

A: I would tell them to try to spend time working, paid or unpaid, in a law office before committing to this as a career. I think that sometimes younger folks see the financial upside of having this kind of practice without realizing the hours and personal commitment that go into it. With regard to family law in particular, I believe that a young person considering this field needs to also understand how personally gut wrenching these types of cases can be. On the one hand, you cannot let the emotions of a case get to you. On the other hand, even more importantly, I do not believe you can be an effective Family Law attorney if you do not have empathy for your client and become invested in the outcome of the case.

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