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law's 'heavy lifting' will seem tame

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BODY:

The "Most Fit Young Lawyers" in Chicago are a 30-year-old personal-injury attorney and a 29-year-old solo practitioner who is the mother of two children.

They won their titles at the first annual Most Fit Young Lawyer Competition sponsored by the Chicago Bar Association's Young Lawyers Section.

Winners were Charles A. (Tony) Piccuta of Strellis & Field Chtd. and Carolyn E. Welch of Glenview.

Piccuta said he did 72 push-ups in 60 seconds and 58 sit-ups in 60 seconds and ran the mile in five minutes 20 seconds.

Welch said she did 60 push-ups in a minute and 44 sit-ups in 60 seconds and ran the mile in six minutes.

Each was monitored by a staff member at West Loop Gym, 1024 W. Kinzie St., and watched by other contestants.

"We haven't heard of any other event like this in the country," said Jill Eckert McCall, who works at the American Bar Association and who created the fitness contest.

"This is high-energy, interactive," McCall said.

It was the kickoff event for the YLS' new program, conceived by section chair William B. Oberts, called Life in the Balance, which stresses a balance between work and life.

Some contestants brought their spouses and children. The contestants "were challenging each other to do push-ups," McCall said. "Everybody was smiling at the end."

The winners in the Oct. 20 contest finished first out of 20 competitors.

The other two events that each contestant did were a chest press and a four-cone test.

The last involved running forward, backward and sideways to either side around a square that was 10 yards on a side.

Piccuta said the chest press was unusual and more difficult than it would be with free weights or a normal exercise machine.

It "was on a free motion cable machine ... designed to force the user into using the smaller stabilizing muscles as well as the major muscle groups," he said. "The maximum on the machine is 200. I was able to press 180 one time."

Piccuta said he can lift 265 pounds in a free-weight bench press.

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Welch said she pressed 80 pounds in this unusual system.

Piccuta won four of the five events among the men, all except for the four-cone test.

In college at California Polytechnic State University, Piccuta was captain of the men's tennis team for two years. He said he still teaches tennis part time at the East Bank Club.

He exercises 10 to 12 hours a week. "I do a lot of weight training and a lot of long-distance running as well as the tennis," Piccuta said.

"In my profession, I see so many injuries, I tend to notice the people who are the most fit before their injury tend to have the best recovery....

"Obviously as a personal-injury attorney, it's important for me to recognize that and stay fit," Piccuta said.

Solo-practitioner Welch placed first in three of the five athletic events, the one-mile run, the push-ups, and the chest press.

She had played softball for the college team at Binghamton University in Binghamton, N.Y.

In law school, she continued to play softball on the club team at Georgetown University Law Center, which competed against other law schools.

At Georgetown, she played alongside her husband, Raam S. Jani, who today is a lawyer here at McDermott, Will & Emery LLP.

She and her husband ran marathons together before their children were born. She said she has run three marathons.

Welch and her husband now have two children, a daughter, 4, and a son, 2. A 2002 graduate of Georgetown Law, she practices law out of their Glenview home.

"I do a general practice," Welch said, "real estate law, probate, some corporate law, contract review and negotiations."

She exercises four to five days a week, including working out in a gym in the Glenview Park District three days a week while her children go to pre-school there.

She also tries to run three or four days a week, including on the weekends with her husband.

On many days Welch runs to one of the local parks while pushing her children in a jogging stroller.

Welch also competed in two triathlons this summer, in Glenview and Naperville.

"I think it's a really great concept the Chicago Bar came up with to get lawyers together who share these same goals," she noted. "It's difficult as a lawyer to maintain a healthy lifestyle.... I was really impressed with the event itself."

For the women, in the individual events not won by the overall champ, Danielle Mihalkanin, a student at The John Marshall Law School, won the four-cone test, and Stephanie J. Villinski, attorney for the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago, won the sit-ups.

Michael A. Passananti, attorney for Handler, Thayer & Duggan LLC, won the four-cone test for the men.

After Welch, the top three female winners overall were Mihalkanin in 2d, then Shamirah Youkhaneh, attorney for the Chicago public schools, and Erin E. Masters, attorney for Nadler, Pritikin & Mirabelli LLC, tied for 3d.

After Piccuta, the top three male winners overall were Chicago-Kent College of Law student James Cerami, 2d place; Passananti in 3d place; and Kyle Montmorency, attorney with Taradji Law Offices, in 4th.

DePaul College of Law had the most alumni and student participants.

The prizes for the two top winners will be awarded at a YLS social from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. on Nov. 15 at Saltaus restaurant and lounge, 1350 W. Randolph St.

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