

## **Interview with Catawba County Assistant Attorney Jodi Stewart Kaitlin Winn, Catawba County**

My name is Kaitlin Winn, I am from Catawba County, and I have an interest in pursuing law as a major in graduate school; therefore I chose to interview my county's assistant attorney in order to gain a real insight into the occupation.

Jodi Stewart is Catawba County's assistant county attorney. At the time I interviewed her, she had only been on the job a few months. Stewart attended Belmont Abbey where she started off studying accounting. She said she enjoyed dealing with taxes and numbers; and it was in her third year that she decided to become a lawyer. She then transferred to UNC Chapel Hill, for her graduate degree in law. Previously before serving Catawba County as an assistant attorney, Jodi Stewart worked in a private law firm that she had interned at while still in school. Jodi Stewart strongly advised me to do an internship with a law firm, because it will help me immensely once I graduate, and start a job search. By having experience with a particular firm could help me gain employment with them after graduation.

One small demographic that I observed in our county attorney offices was that, both the county attorney and assistant county attorney are both women. As a woman myself I find this very inspiring that the occupation is not dominated by men, when traditionally it is thought of to be a man's career. Learning this in my interview boosted my confidence for when I attend law school, because these two strong women have proven that women can perform the job just as well; and that men aren't prejudice of women. I asked Stewart if she encountered any gender discrimination in school or the work place. Her response was never did anyone ever treat her differently because she was a woman, but she did mention that, "It was more of my age." Jodi Stewart is young, and working with all the older seasoned lawyers, regardless of gender, who have been in the business for twenty plus years; they took a while to acknowledge that she was just as capable to handle a case.

When asked about the major differences between working for a private firm and the county, Stewart replied, "The biggest change is the speed at which issues are handled." She explained to me that in a private law firm the case could take months from start to finish. While working at the county; cases are resolved quickly and do not spend more than a week on the desk; unless it is a major conflict or issue.

There are many responsibilities which a county attorney and assistant attorney have to bear. The list is startling long for all the issues and conflicts that occur within your county, that have to be dealt with on a daily basis; and only two people carry the majority of the load. It is astonishing to think of what the two women of my county are able to accomplish. Of course they are not alone, but being an attorney requires a lot of discipline.

Being a lawyer requires many specific skills that have to be cultivated and perfected. Lawyers should be proficient with time management, communicating, researching, and organization. Jodi Stewart informed me that; the extensive research that is required to put together a case or brief is her favorite aspect of the job. Other important skills would be reading, speaking, and the most important trait to have would be the ability to write. You must love to write if you want to be an attorney. However Stewart tells me that to write like a lawyer is different from standard papers and literature. They have to be able to write clearly the precise agreement or argument; there is no room for error. She also said a majority of her time at work is spent gathering information and research to prepare briefs.

By doing this interview I gained an inside perspective of being a county attorney. I learned much about the everyday functions of the occupation that I did not know beforehand. It has prepared me for when I go to college and seek an internship; and when I graduate and look for a career.