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OZAUKEE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SMALL BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

## O'Leary-Guth racking up recognitions for its law practice

Firm has partnerships with about 20 local organizations

By Kyle Doubrava - Special to the News Graphic  
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Pictured is the team at O'Leary-Guth Law Office. Front from left, Mackenzie Linger, Stephany Hernandez, Emily Walter and Marina Pappas; center row from left, Kari Chang, attorney T. Samuel Azinger, attorney Maureen O'Leary-Guth, Heather Triplett and attorney Azene Seifoddini; back row from left, attorney Benjamin Rydecki, attorney Alicia Bernards, attorney Jeremy Guth, Maxwell Jozwiak and Kenneth Smith, Sr.

Photo by Mark Justesen/News Graphic staff

MEQUON — This is not the first time O’Leary-Guth Law Office has been honored with a prestigious award, but for its president, each accolade sets her standards higher than the last.

O’Leary-Guth Law Office is one of three local businesses being presented with Business of the Year awards by the Ozaukee Economic Development. O’Leary-Guth is the recipient of the Small Business of the Year Award, along with Philip Lithographing (medium), and SEEK Careers (large).

All three businesses will receive their awards during a ceremony on Sept. 27 at the Ozaukee Pavilion at Ozaukee County Fairgrounds.

O’Leary-Guth Law Office has amassed more than a dozen awards in the last five years alone. Maureen O’Leary-Guth, president and owner, credits her team’s tireless work ethic and passion to serve others for landing yet another distinguished honor.

"It’s a very exciting feeling to initially hear that you’ve won," O’Leary-Guth said. "It was a surprise and an honor. It recognizes all the hard work that’s been put into getting to this point. It’s a fulfilling feeling and it validates in some way everything the firm has been doing. It lets you know you’re on the right path."

But, as she also notes, another award means aiming even higher with her firm’s quality of service. And that’s a challenge she fully embraces.

"It also feels like a new chapter because it inspires us to think about what is the next step from here as a leader in the industry and in the community," she said. "How do we push to the next level? I think it transitions from a feeling of excitement to one of inspiration."

The law office specializes in many disciplines, but particularly in estate planning. One of O’Leary-Guth’s successes this past year involved expanding their staff and their working space. When she gained control of the firm in 2019, O’Leary-Guth had just five employees. Fast forward to today, that figure has grown to a team of 17.

Part of that expansion is due to the firm experiencing a drastic increase in demand for estate planning during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people who had been procrastinating on starting the process had suddenly felt a need to get their affairs in order.

At the end of last year, O'Leary-Guth and her husband and business partner, Jeremy Guth, relocated from their longtime but relatively cramped office space on Main Street in Thiensville and moved into a larger space in Mequon. It was an adventure trying to fit numerous employees in a small dwelling.

"I never expected to move at all, but once I had two people in every office and a law student in the hallway, it was time to find someplace bigger," O'Leary-Guth said. "That was a significant step for us."

The office is distinct from others in the region because O'Leary-Guth herself is a Fellow of the American College of Trust and Estate Counsel (ACTEC), an esteemed group of many of the best trust and estate attorneys in the world.

"The original founder of our firm, Andrew Willms, was an ACTEC fellow, and still is," O'Leary-Guth said. "It gives you connection to cutting edge developments in the field and incredibly resources to be completely proficient in everything you need to be. Normally, ACTEC fellows are found in much bigger firms and bigger cities, so that by itself is a distinguishing mark for us."

O'Leary-Guth noted her firm will be positioned well to address any changes to the estate tax system. Currently, estate tax applies to assets over \$12.92 million, but that figure may decrease once certain parts of the current federal tax code expire in 2025, resulting in more people becoming eligible to pay.

"Back in the day, estate tax planning was important for people who had estates of, say, \$1 million," O'Leary-Guth said. "Currently, it's for people that are over \$10 million who are more highly affected by it, but that might be coming down. So it's going to make us an

important resource in the community. We never stopped doing advanced estate tax planning. We've been proud to maintain all those skills."

Aside from its professional expertise, the office is highly active in the community. With nearly 20 partnerships established with local organizations, O'Leary-Guth is not shy about becoming involved whenever possible.

"We won this award in large part because we've taken a role as a community member very seriously," O'Leary-Guth said. "It's one of those things where the more you do, the more fun you have. Meeting one person leads to meeting another person, and before you know it, you're with friends and you're helping the community at the same time."

O'Leary-Guth herself is serving as president of the Thiensville-Mequon Rotary Club and the Milwaukee Estate Planning Forum. One point of emphasis she has been trying to make this year is preparing the future generations of estate lawyers by hosting law students at the office for presentations and internships.

"We plan to continue with those and raise up young lawyers and teach them the best practices so the field will continue to have great estate planning lawyers," she said.

O'Leary-Guth credits the firm's founder, Andrew Willms, for laying a strong foundation for success. Combined with her husband, Jeremy Guth, and her driven and loyal team, O'Leary-Guth is grateful for earning and maintaining the trust among her clients. To win awards such as these, you can't go at it alone.

"Without my people, we'd have nothing," she said.

O'Leary-Guth Law Office is located at 251 W. Glen Oaks Lane in Mequon.