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GCC Profile

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By Kenneth Davis

When Angela Williams was in the 11th grade, she had her career goals narrowed down to two options: she was either going to be a professional musician or an attorney.

She had a great love for music, had been studying classical piano since the age of seven, and was good enough to get into a music conservatory. However, she

was also very interested in the law and saw it as a powerful tool that she could use to help others. Williams finally decided that the law would be the better career fit for her, but she has never lost her passion for music.



Angela Williams

"I think I'm like a number of people when they think about going into law," she said. "You want to help the underdog and use it as an opportunity to advocate on behalf of people. I think one of the things that also contributed to that for me was that I grew up initially in South Carolina, where my dad was a pastor, and during my early years, he was head of the NAACP for the State of South

Carolina. And he was very active with Martin Luther King and very active in leading marches and demonstrations during the Civil Rights era. So I think it made a great impression on me when I was a young kid."

As General Counsel for the YMCA of the USA (Y-USA), the national resource office for more than 2,700 YMCAs around the country, Williams gets many opportunities to utilize the law to help others. Collectively, the U.S. YMCAs form the largest not-for-profit community-service organization in the nation. The organization works to meet the health and human-services needs of 20.2 million men, women, and children in 10,000 communities in the United States.

Since joining the organization as general counsel in its Chicago headquarters on December 1 last year, Williams has dealt with a slew of different legal issues and matters. One of the big issues that she deals with on a regular basis is insurance.

"YMCAs are the largest providers of childcare in the country," Williams said, "so I deal with all of the issues that surround childcare, such as insurance for having children on the premises."

Williams added that YMCAs also have fitness and aquatic centers, and so she deals with insurance matters related to running these centers, as well as issues pertaining to swim meets and potential drownings at these facilities.

"And there was an issue in terms of getting insurance," she said, "so about 20 years ago, the YMCA decided to create an insurance company located in Bermuda, which is a for-profit company. And also out of that, we created a claims-administration back-office company in the United States for the

insurance company, so all of the issues surrounding managing an insurance company I've been involved with."

Since the YMCA is a not-for-profit organization, Williams also has to deal with a number of tax issues. She was recently on Capitol Hill for a meeting with some U.S. Senators and some House Ways and Means Committee members to discuss issues and tax laws being considered by the Senate and the House that would affect nonprofits.

Additionally, Williams has been helping to oversee a major construction project in which her organization has been involved. The Y-USA owns the YMCA in Jerusalem as well as a retreat facility near the Sea of Galilee, said Williams.

"And so 10 years ago, we entered into a joint venture with a real estate developer to develop part of our land," she said. "The YMCA of the USA actually owns the national soccer stadium for the country of Israel. When the country decided to build a new soccer stadium, I think they moved it to Tel Aviv."

"We had all of this land," she continued, "and we decided to enter into a joint venture with a real estate developer to build about 250 luxury condominium units, a new 90,000-square-foot fitness and aquatic center, and a 600-slot parking garage. We also have in our existing building a 52-room hotel and a restaurant. So we are in the process of finishing up the construction and development, and so I'm currently working with the developer, helping oversee the construction and all of the issues that go along with that."

She said a key litigation matter that Y-USA has to contend with on a regular

basis involves trademark issues relating to the YMCA brand, as it is the organization's "most valuable asset."

"We're often trying to make sure that vendors don't take the YMCA logo and use it or that other entities [don't] try to use the YMCA logo and say they're affiliated with us and they're not," Williams stated. "So every week, we're defending our logo and sending out cease-and-desist letters."

She said that what she enjoys most about her job as general counsel is "that every day is different." Williams added that one of the most difficult challenges of her job is "prioritizing, because there are so many major issues going on at once."

Williams studied American government as an undergraduate at the University of Virginia, receiving her B.A. in 1985. She then entered the University of Texas School of Law, where she earned her law degree in 1988.

After law school, Williams worked as an Assistant Staff Judge Advocate for the United States Air Force, serving on active duty in Kansas, the Republic of Korea, and Washington, DC. She remained with the Air Force until 1995 and then went to work as an Assistant United States Attorney for the United States Attorney's Office, Middle District of Florida.

In 1996, Williams joined the Department of Justice's National Church Arson Task Force as a federal prosecutor. While with the task force, she successfully investigated and prosecuted hate crimes involving the arson of black churches.

From 1998 to 2000, she served as Special Counsel on Criminal Law for the

Office of Senator Edward M. Kennedy. She joined the Washington, DC, office of law firm Bryan Cave, LLP, in 2000, where she remained until 2004.

During this time, Williams made further academic achievements; in 2001, she earned a Master of Divinity degree, cum laude, from the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia, and became an ordained Baptist minister.

From March 2004 to April 2005, she was Vice President, Deputy General Counsel, and Chief Compliance and Ethics Officer for Sears, Roebuck and Company, and from May 2005 to January 2006, she was Vice President and Deputy General Counsel for Litigation and Government Affairs for the company.

Following that, she worked with former presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton on the Bush-Clinton Katrina Fund.

"So I managed \$25 million worth of grants for the presidents," Williams said. "And I administered those grants and gave out grants to rebuild houses of worship that were affected in the Gulf Coast region."

Williams worked on the Bush-Clinton Katrina Fund until she joined YMCA of the USA in December 2006.

She had the following advice for law students interested in pursuing careers in-house:

"Most corporations would prefer people who have worked in a law firm first, so the first thing to do is get practical experience in a law firm. And if you're

interested in litigation, because corporations are always looking for litigators, the best thing to do is become a prosecutor...that way, you're better able to strategize about the appropriate position for the corporation to take to oversee the litigators that you hire as outside counsel to make sure they're representing your company's interest."

She said the two people who have influenced her most in her legal career are LaDawn Naegle, who's a partner at Bryan Cave, and Donna Bucella, who was the director of the Terrorist Screening Center for the FBI and is now Business Continuity Executive for Bank of America.

Q. What are your hobbies and interests?

A. I love to see movies. I love thrillers, anything with car chases, spy movies. And I love to travel, and I travel quite a bit for work but also for pleasure. The other thing I love doing is hanging out with a lot of kids from church. At least once or twice a month, we're hanging out with a bunch of high school and junior high school students. And I love my church activities and just spending time with friends and family.

Q. What was most recently in your CD player or on your iPod?

A. Well, I have a range because I love gospel music, praise and worship music, and then jazz, so it's a whole bunch of stuff. I just loaded, like, a thousand songs on my iPod. One of my favorite artists is Israel & New Breed.

Q. What's the last magazine you read?

A. *TIME* magazine.

Q. What's your favorite TV show?

A. *The Unit* and all the *CSI* shows.

Q. Who is your role model?

A. My parents.

Williams emphasized the importance of attorneys achieving work-life balance:

"I think it is critical because I can't stress enough the importance of being well

rounded, and...I've always encouraged young associates to do...things for fun— things like community service. Don't just get stuck in going from work to home and back again. Make time to play. For example, even though I gave up pursuing music professionally, I have still kept up with my music over the years. I was minister of music at churches; I conducted gospel music workshops all over the country, directed choirs. So I've always had other creative outlets."

Williams was born in Anderson, South Carolina. She said that since her father joined the Navy as a chaplain when she was six, she grew up all over the country. She is also President of the Board of Directors for Christian Services Charities, and in 2001, *The New York Times* and *L Magazine* featured her in articles about people who pursue two full-time professions. She has been married for almost two years.

On the Net

The YMCA of the USA

www.ymca.net

University of Texas at Austin School of Law

www.utexas.edu/law

Bush-Clinton Katrina Fund

www.bushclintonkatrinafund.org