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A blind date leads to marriage and a 20-year law firm partnership

Spouses Warren and Joan Kessler are particularly known for complex tax work

By **Melanie Brisbon**
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CENTURY CITY— In 1967, a law student at the University of Michigan decided to ask a recent college graduate on a blind date after getting her name from two different friends who didn't know each other.

"I called Joan up on a Saturday afternoon and asked her if she wanted to go to a party and the movies, and she said yes," said Warren "Skip" J. Kessler. "Joan says, when I walked into the door of her apartment, she knew she was going to marry me. I didn't know until the next day."

Nearly 50 years later, that blind date has led to two very successful partnerships. The couple will celebrate their 45th wedding anniversary next year, and, earlier this month, the small law firm they co-founded feted its 20th birthday. Kessler & Kessler ALC of Century City, which represents businesses, high net worth individuals and institutions in tax, real estate, estate planning and corporate matters, has had a thriving practice since its inception.

Before starting the firm, Skip Kessler had already practiced for nearly 20 years and Joan Kessler, who has a Ph.D. in speech communication, had also worked for several years as a jury consultant prior to becoming an attorney. Since founding their firm, Skip Kessler has handled the transactional

side of the practice, focusing mostly on tax planning for complex real estate transactions, while Joan Kessler has seen her practice evolve from business, tax and employment litigation to primarily mediation and arbitration.

"We had both been practicing for a decent while," said Skip Kessler. "With the two of us being together, if we could generate at least 10 percent more revenue, that would make it worth it."

The results were better than expected. The firm's highly specialized expertise in tax matters is attractive to clients.

"We're not all things to all people," said Skip Kessler. "I believe all of our clients use other lawyers for other things and they use us for these complicated tax-driven real estate transactions."

The firm has handled a number of complex matters throughout the years. Skip Kessler did real estate, tax and corporate transactions for all of the late magazine publisher Robert E. Petersen's businesses. He's also working on quite a few other billion-dollar projects.

And in 2000, in *Estate of Morton B. Harper, Deceased, Michael A. Harper, Executor v. the Commissioner of Internal Revenue*, 19336-98 (9th Cir.), the Kesslers represented two taxpayers in defeating a partial summary judgment motion brought by the IRS. The case is sometimes referenced when the tax agency deals with family limited partnerships.

Kessler & Kessler has staffed the firm with around two other attorneys at a time. They say they're proud to have had a significant impact on the careers of several former employees. Philip M. Matthys, a former clerk for the firm, is now the director of business affairs at NBCUniversal



Courtesy of Kessler & Kessler ALC

Joan and Warren "Skip" Kessler of Century City business boutique Kessler & Kessler ALC recently marked their firm's 20th year.

Television Studios. Lesa H. Andelson is now an attorney with Lionsgate Entertainment, and David J. Warner is now at the IRS district counsel's office in Laguna Niguel.

Over the years, the firm has also donated its time to philanthropic projects. Petersen and his late wife, Margie, got the firm's help in two separate pro bono matters — one involved changing the ownership of

the Petersen Automotive Museum from the County of Los Angeles to a foundation that bears the museum's name, and the other involved donating a building to the Boys and Girls Club of Hollywood.

The firm also works with St. Vincent's Meals on Wheels program and various affordable housing initiatives throughout the state, as well as contributing to the University of

Michigan's perpetual Joan B. Kessler award, honoring deserving graduate students.

Nearly 70 people came to support the firm's 20th anniversary celebration at the Century Plaza Hotel last week. The Kesslers also took the opportunity to make a contribution to the legal aid center at the Karsch Center of Wilshire Boulevard Temple.

"When I was getting my doctorate,

Skip and I were just starting out. We were newly married and had no money at all," said Joan Kessler. "The University of Michigan Rackham School gave me a fellowship to help me finish my dissertation. I say to the awardees each year, when you're in a position to give back, we want you to give back also, if you can."

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