



Spirits of the Law

Why Kim Willoughby is the unofficial state bar mixologist BY ANDREW ENGELSON



Kimberly R. Willoughby

WILLOUGHBY & ASSOCIATES

FAMILY LAW

DENVER

Family law and estate planning attorney Kim Willoughby is a popular participant at meetings of the Colorado Bar Association, and not just because of her legal insights. She also mixes the cocktails.

"I'll do my presentation, and then go sling drinks," Willoughby says. "I make cocktails that involve vodka and a lot of fresh fruit and fresh herbs, or even fresh vegetables. I'll go pour them for the bar association folks and they love it."

The vodka she uses in those drinks comes from the distillery that she and her husband Jon own and run: Vanjak Vodka, based in Golden, Colorado.

Vanjak began appearing on liquor store shelves in April 2015. The company, which sells its vodka from Denver to Fort Collins, is named for members of the Willoughby/Guelzow clan: Van, Jory Anna and Kim. Jon used his experience in the liquor distribution industry to get the idea off the ground, and now that the company is up and running, it's Willoughby's goal to eventually produce craft gin and bourbon in addition to vodka.

The booze business also offers a nice break from her law practice. "I do death and divorce," Willoughby says. "I needed some way to be more fun at parties."

Vanjak is also a way to reconnect her family to South Dakota, where her great-great-grandfather was once a homesteader, where she was born, and where she still owns property. She hopes to expand the business there.

"My family is from a town called Bonesteel," Willoughby says. "It's a place with a hundred people and

five thousand cows. So the dream is to make Bonesteel Whiskey. South Dakota is one of the biggest producers of rye. I like rye whiskey. And on this property there's this artesian well. Right now it's just watering the cows."

Willoughby is thinking so far ahead, she's even picked several potential brides in the town for her 13-year-old son to marry some day. "They're currently between the ages of 3 and 11," she says with a chuckle. "He can pick from any of them." Even if that doesn't pan out, Willoughby hopes her kids will be interested in continuing the family business.

Having a law practice also comes in handy when navigating the complex regulations of the liquor industry, she says, although that's where the overlap ends. "My practice is high-end," she notes, "so my clients are usually professionals. Then you get into the liquor industry and they're much more, well, freaks and geeks. A lot more tattoos and lot more smiles. It's a whole different world. It's fun to be in both."

Though it may be a few years before the family business makes its way to Bonesteel, Willoughby takes her family up to the South Dakota property several times a year, where she has already built a road and pole barn, but still needs a house. In the interim, she concedes that where she lives now—in the foothills of the Front Range—isn't too bad. "I wake up and I'll see a herd of 200 elk," she says. "I feed a flock of 20 turkeys every day. I have coyotes that go through my yard, and I've seen bear, too. I love where I live."

Favorite Willoughby cocktail recipes

STRAWBERRY BASIL SMASH

- 4 large strawberries
- 3 basil leaves
- Squeeze of balsamic-infused simple syrup
- Juice of ½ lemon
- 1.5 oz of Vanjak vodka
- Club soda

DIRECTIONS

In a mixing glass, muddle the strawberries and basil leaves. Squeeze in juice of ½ lemon. Add 2 teaspoons of simple syrup, plus the vodka and ice cubes. Take another glass and mix by pouring the drink back and forth between glasses. Top with club soda. Garnish with a small basil leaf.

Simple syrup: add one cup of sugar to one cup of water. Add in a tablespoon of balsamic vinegar. Mix. Heat to boiling. Reduce heat and simmer for 5 min. Cool.

GRANDMA SUE'S LEMONADE—PITCHER

- 1 cup fresh lemon juice
- ¾ cup vanilla bean-infused simple syrup
- 8 cups of water
- 1.5 oz Vanjak vodka per glass

DIRECTIONS

Combine lemon juice, simple syrup and water in a large pitcher. Chill. Fill a glass with ice, and add 1.5 oz of Vanjak vodka. Pour in lemonade. Garnish with a sprig of mint.

Simple syrup: add one cup of sugar to one cup of water. Add in 4 Madagascar vanilla bean pods. Scoop out the beans if you can. Mix. Heat to boiling. Reduce heat and simmer for 5 min. Cool.

