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IN RECESS

Reading the Water

Keker Van Nest partner Jennifer Huber skillfully navigates steep river rapids and litigation.

By Shane Nelson
Daily Journal Staff Writer

Trade secret attorney Jennifer A. Huber has always been a bit of an adrenaline junkie, and for a time, negotiating whitewater rapids was the litigator's go-to fix.

"When you're on a river and the horizon drops, there's a huge thrill in that," Huber said of plunging over a steep rapid.

"It's transcendent to be on a river," the Keker Van Nest & Peters LLP partner added. "You can't speed it up. You can't slow it down. It just moves at this different, age-old pace."

Huber worked as a professional guide on the Arkansas River in Colorado during the summers of 2002 and 2003, a gig she pursued, in part, to escape the application-filing tedium of earlier work as an immigration firm legal assistant.

"I was a very eager guide," Huber said of her time on the popular Browns Canyon stretch of the Arkansas. "I would sometimes do two or three trips in a day. And I was the first one to show up in the spring, when the season was just starting, and the last one to fold up the tent in the fall."

Standing only 5 feet 3 inches tall, Huber learned early that she couldn't just muscle her company's 14-foot rubber rafts — loaded occasionally with up to 13 passengers — through Browns Canyon's collection of class 3 and 4 whitewater rapids.

"For someone who is smaller, it's incredibly important to read the water," she said. "The worst thing you can do when you're rafting is to go into a big rapid sideways, because the boat will flip over. ... So there's



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a lot of anticipation and preparing for what's ahead."

Regularly guiding families, religious groups, and Boy Scout troops, Huber was charged with educating them quickly about how best to paddle as a team and she was also responsible for fishing the occasional overboard rafter out of the drink.

"In Colorado, it was all about keeping everyone in the boat," she said, noting the Arkansas is a snowmelt river featuring especially frigid temperatures early in the season.

Huber's Colorado outfit enforced a strict penalty for guides who allowed paddlers to fall overboard.

"If one of your passengers swam, you had to buy all the other guides a six-pack," she said, laughing. "And if you as the guide fell out, then you had to buy everyone a 12-pack."

Huber completed her law degree at UC Berkeley School of Law in 2006 and later began guiding trips down the South Fork of the American River through the nonprofit

organization Friends of the River. In 2010, she helped arrange a rafting excursion down the American for a number of her Keker Van Nest colleagues.

"We didn't do anything super dangerous," recalled Keker partner Jo W. Golub. "But we definitely did go through some rapids, and some people did fall out."

Despite some of the unplanned swimming, Golub said the collection of litigators was in "safe hands" with Huber and was quick to note that the guide showed everyone a good time.

"You don't go rafting to just be safe," Golub said. "You go rafting to be on the edge a little."

Cody S. Harris, another Keker partner who joined the American River firm outing, said the whitewater trip reminded him of his day job.

"River rafting is similar to litigation in that there are long periods of calm punctuated by extreme activity and mild terror," he explained with a laugh.

Harris said Huber approaches both the law and the river with an easygoing, calm demeanor but added that his partner doesn't shy away from challenges in either pursuit.

"Jen works on some high-stakes litigation matters that are not for the faint of heart," he said. "So it's no surprise that she can also go down class 5 rapids."

Lindsay Llewellyn, a Lyft Inc. associate general counsel who's worked with Huber on employee mobility matters, said the Keker partner is an "extraordinarily effective" attorney.

"Jen can be disarming in that she is a very tough litigator but also very reasoned," Llewellyn said. "She doesn't portray herself at all as an aggressive person, but she is a very tough negotiator and a tough lawyer."

A married mother of two daughters, Huber said she tries to spend as much time as possible on the river with her family. She and her husband purchased a cabin not too long ago on the Russian River in Guerneville in Sonoma County.

"It's a dump, but the draw of the house is it came with a couple boats," Huber said, noting that her 2- and 6-year-old are "still working on how to listen to mom's commands."

Conceding that family river excursions are not as wild as those of her Colorado past, Huber said she does occasionally miss the thrill of negotiating a hairy stretch of whitewater.

"There are few things I've done that are so engrossing both physically and intellectually," she said. "It's an incredible team effort, the camaraderie of being on a raft and successfully navigating something that can be so treacherous."