

# BULL RUN OBSERVER™

Friday, November 13, 2020

WESTERN PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY'S FAVORITE HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER

www.bullrunnow.com

Vol. 22 No. 7 \$1.25

## CONTINUING REPORT: How Pandemic is affecting local businesses

By JAN DAVIS  
Observer staff

The Hopkins Law Firm opened in Gainesville nine years ago and has been serving its clients faithfully, even through the pandemic.

Michelle Hopkins, attorney/owner, earned a BS degree from George Mason University, 1993, a Master of Public Administration from Troy State University, 2003, and a Juris Doctorate from GMU, 2008.

The practice also includes Weyinmi Shekoni, associate attorney who graduated from American University Washington College of Law in 2016 and began working for the firm in March 2019. Prior to working for The Hopkins Law Firm, she worked for the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration for three years

The practice has three paralegals, Lindsay Sampson, Sydney Remaily and Brenna Doane. Sharon Munroe has worked as the firm's accounting bookkeeper since 2018, and Joyce Hewitt is the firm's receptionist. Michael S. Hopkins is the Executive Director of the firm.

The practice serves a wide variety of law issues. "We mostly do family law—handling cases regarding divorce, child and spousal support, child visitation and custody. Michelle has handled both interstate and international family law cases. She and has extensive experience in the intricacies of military divorce and the issues of government employees across the spectrum, including the State Department and intelligence community," said Michael.



Courtesy Photo

**Hopkins Law paralegal, Lindsay Sampson, took Michelle and Michael Hopkins' two daughters to the Prince William County Animal Shelter. The girls donated homemade dog treats for the dogs, and they selected an adoptable dog, Broly, for which the firm proudly sponsored the adoption fee.**

"The firm handles adoptions, offers mediation service, estate planning, including Wills, Power of Attorneys, Advanced Medical Directives and Trusts. It also assists with various driving and traffic cases. Michelle is both a diplomatic negotiator and aggressive litigator. She customizes her approach based upon each

client's unique needs."

Like all businesses, The Hopkins Firm has been affected by the COVID 19 pandemic, but it believes in not an entirely negative way.

Michael said, "The Court had seven emergency executive orders delaying their normal proceedings, which pushed some of

our cases out. This time was used to settle many of the cases, saving our clients' money and sparing them the stress some experience as a result of litigation.

"During this time, the office staff has practiced social distancing as each has his or her own office. If clients need to sign documents, it is done in the office's parking lot, weather permitting. Each person must wear a face mask if signings must take place in the lobby or its large conference room.

Michael said, "We have heavily relied upon Zoom and phone calls to keep our team and clients safe, as well. Our contact with clients has not at all been negatively impacted. I might even say it has improved, as we are more accessible than ever. We have found the silver lining in this difficult time; with less client traffic, we have all been dressing casually instead of in business attire. I think we will all miss this when life goes back to normal."

The staff strives to be accessible to answer questions about each client's case. Michael explained, "Michelle's mission is to provide clients with the personal attention and respect that they deserve. By working personally with each client, it helps to establish a relationship of trust between the firm and the client. Michelle champions for her clients by advocating for their rights."

During the pandemic, Michelle has advice for folks. "When things are tense at home, I always advise clients to go on a walk if they are able. I cannot place enough value on walks. Just stepping outside and

getting fresh air and exercise every day makes a big difference when you are living in an incredibly stressful situation. Gainesville has many nice areas to walk while social distancing, for example, the pond behind the movie theatre is very peaceful."

Her family has had many special times during COVID 19. She said, "I have really enjoyed the extra quality time that I spent with my children, [her two daughters] and my husband. We have gone hiking, gone on picnics, danced to tik-toks, walked our dogs, cooked many delicious meals and streamed lots of movies."

With the extra time the pandemic has given the Hopkins Family, Michelle wanted the family to put it to good use.

She said, "My paralegal, Lindsay, took my daughters to the Prince William County Animal Shelter, and they donated homemade dog treats for the dogs waiting to be adopted, and they selected an adoptable dog, Broly, for which the firm proudly sponsored the adoption fee. We were so excited to see that Broly was adopted quickly, and we wish him and his family the very best."

The Hopkins Firm's hours are 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday-Friday. They are currently located at 7130 Heritage Village Plaza, Ste 201, Gainesville, VA 20155.

The office can be reached at 571-248-2210, and its web site is mshopkins@mhopkinslaw.com.

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