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This Big Law Partner's Hobby Is Sew Cool



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Sidley Austin partner Paige Montgomery of Dallas holds a Costa Rican boy in January after helping build a home for the boy's family and gifting them each a handmade quilt.

She's a Big Law litigator by profession, but in her personal time, Sidley Austin partner Paige Montgomery of Dallas pieces together a hobby that provides serenity for her and comfort for those in need.

Quilting has enabled Montgomery, 40, to slow her pace of life to a meditative crawl—and she has left behind piles of beautiful quilts in the process, while touching the lives of family, Big Law colleagues, and even strangers in need as far away as Costa Rica.

"In our work, we have investigations and cases and those things have intermediate deadlines, but they don't have quite the same sense, 'It's done,' that you get with a finished quilt," Montgomery said. "I'm a better-rounded person than I was before I started doing it. It

lets me express parts of my personality that otherwise wouldn't come out.”

Montgomery handles complex commercial litigation. Clients have included Verizon Communications Inc. and Motient Corp., according to court documents. She also represents companies in government investigatory proceedings and assists with internal company investigations. Montgomery earned her law degree at Southern Methodist University Dedman School of Law in Dallas in 2002. She clerked for U.S. District Judge Harold “Barefoot” Sanders for a year, and then worked as an associate with Weil, Gotshal & Manges in Dallas from 2003 to 2013. She moved to Sidley Austin in 2013, and became a partner there in 2015.

Montgomery started quilting four years ago while making a bedspread for her son. Looking back, it's not her best work—but it's high in sentimental value.

“He sleeps with it every night. It's a well-loved quilt,” Montgomery said. “It's like wrapping him up in a hug.”

She's found meditative qualities in the pace of the sewing, and the extreme focus the work requires. There are measurable steps to complete a quilt, and tangible proof and a sense of accomplishment when a block or a top is done. That is a nice difference, compared with practicing law.

“Practicing law is very rewarding, but also stressful, and for me the quilting has become a creative outlet,” she noted. “This is my way of taking my stress down at the end of the day.”

Since beginning to quilt four years ago, all of Montgomery's relatives have received a quilt, and so have many of her colleagues at Sidley.

Fellow litigator Yolanda Garcia of Dallas received a baby blanket from Montgomery, with patterns in bright orange, pink and white—the colors of Garcia's now 2-year-old daughter's nursery.

“My baby has basically slept with it almost every night,” said Garcia, who has worked with Montgomery for 15 years. “I treasure when people make things for me personally, because it's so rare to have that kind of attention and ability in our modern age, when things are mass produced. So for me, I know I treasure it, for her not only to share her spirit and time, but also leave something beautiful behind.”

It's fun making a quilt with someone specific in mind, noted Montgomery.

“Almost always, I'm trying to make a finished product I think they would enjoy and appreciate,” she said. “A lot of the enjoyment comes from the planning.”

As her hobby grew, Montgomery joined an online community of quilters on Instagram by posting photos of her quilts, following other quilters, and commenting about her new friends' work. The Instagram quilters would examine her quilts and give advice. Each year, using a hashtag—“#getyourquiltywishesgranted”—the Instagram quilters would throw out requests for supplies like special fabric, and others would respond by giving it for free.

The tradition sparked an idea for Montgomery. She and her husband and three children—who are now 7, 10 and 12—had previously traveled to Costa Rica twice to build houses with Homes of Hope International, a Christian nonprofit that builds homes for poor people in

impoverished nations. On the second trip, she wanted to make quilts for the families, too. At the time, it seemed like a crazy dream, she said. She was a new quilter back then, and she was skeptical that she could create so many quilts on her own.

With a third trip planned for January 2017, Montgomery put out the call to Instagram quilters using #getyourquiltywishesgranted. The community responded with blocks, tops, binding and even some finished quilts.

“The response was completely overwhelming—generosity of strangers from all over the world,” she recalled. “It’s very redeeming of humanity.”

She quilted a lot of the blankets herself and got help from other Instagram friends. In the end, there were 35 quilts, enough to cover each bed in all of the homes that volunteers built on the Costa Rica trip, and leftovers for the charity to distribute later.

“It was very rewarding to be able to give those people—they were getting a home, a huge change for them—but this felt more personal for me,” said Montgomery, who plans to bring more quilts the next time her family visits Costa Rica. “It makes all the work worth it: the late nights binding quilts, after working all day, to makes sure they were finished.”

Katie Kasel, Montgomery’s friend and fellow Instagram quilter, said she wasn’t surprised that Montgomery planned the extreme gift-giving project.

“She is a very giving person. If she notices somebody who is part of some of our groups having a hard time, she says, ‘We should do this for them.’ She’s always thinking of other people,” Kasel said. “When you have a talent like she does and turn it into something good like that, I feel this is the reason we were given these talents—to share them.”

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