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Mediator finds calling outside of court - Page 2

A graduate of Samford University's Cumberland School of Law, Obradovic scored a perfect 150 on the bar exam in 1999. She said she read all 22 volumes of the 1974 World Book Encyclopedia the summer after sixth grade. The Roebuck Springs resident also is trained as a French chef.

"I've always been high energy," she said, smiling.

She releases some of her energy playing paintball three times a month. Her paintball persona is "The Blonde Phantom," the name of a 1940s comic book character that might as well be her moniker at the courthouse.

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"She clears a lot of cases up that never really come to our attention," said Presiding Circuit Court Judge Scott Vowell.

Time, money saved:

Settling a case is less costly in terms of time and money for both the parties at odds and the courts, the judge said.

The free services offered by volunteer mediators in district court are worth more than \$60,000 a year, District Court Judge Jack Lowther estimates. But Lowther said it's the intangible savings that are worth the most.

"There is a relationship other than being a party to a lawsuit that we've got to worry about," he said. "The mediation process actually allows the parties to walk out of there and have a good relationship in spite of suing each other."

When she is not working at her private practice or volunteering at the courthouse, Obradovic works as a professor at Cumberland. She has taught nearly 800 students her methods and also published papers on mediation.

Every Friday she oversees volunteer attorney mediators at the courthouse. Litigants arrive prepared to battle before a judge over their small claims cases. But before they go head to head, the three civil district court judges ask them to consider stepping out of the courtroom.

Last Friday, three of the five cases in Lowther's courtroom that went to mediation were resolved without the judge, including Shenita Morrow's. Morrow had been sued by Sam McGaughy over \$2,281 in unpaid rent. The two met in a conference room with a volunteer attorney mediator, and in less than 45 minutes, they had agreed to a payment plan. McGaughy even wished his debtor well.

"The setting was more at ease, more peaceful than standing in front of a judge having to do it that way," Morrow said.

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Obradovic, who stepped in to help mediate, was pleased with the results.

"When they came in, they expected to fight to the death - it's win or lose," Obradovic said. "They left basically with the relationship repaired."

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