

Small town upbringing suited South Dakota lawyer to a tee

By Brian Cox



When attorney Kraig Kronaizl tells you he grew up in a small town, odds are very good it's even smaller than you think.

With a population hovering around 800, Kronaizl's hometown of Scotland, South Dakota draws its name from the Scottish immigrants who settled it in the late 1800s and thought the geography looked like the rolling hills of Scotland. Largely an agricultural community, the town is in the southeast corner of the state, approximately an hour or so from Sioux Falls, where Kronaizl now works at the law firm of Lynn Jackson Shultz & Lebrun, P.C.

"I loved growing up in a small town because you get to do a little bit of everything," says Kronaizl, who had 30 students in his senior class and who had the opportunity to play multiple sports as well as participate in other academic and musical activities. "You're not forced to choose a path per se. I like that about growing up in a small town."

The downside?

"No matter what you do," says Kronaizl, "everybody's going to know because everybody knows who you are."

And everyone certainly knew the Kronaizls. His father, Dennis, still owns an insurance company in town and his mother, Linda, was a music teacher.



Kraig Kronaizl hopes to pass on his passion for golf to his son, Christian.

"My dad was the athlete, my mom was the musician and so I had to do a little bit of everything to make everyone happy," says Kronaizl, who in addition to being a sport fanatic played the trumpet and sang, for which he received a music scholarship to Augustana College in Sioux Falls. "If it was summer, I was either on a baseball field or a golf course. That's just the way I grew up."

While at Augustana earning a degree in business administration, Kronaizl was encouraged by two professors to consider law school. Uncertain at the time what he wanted to do after graduation in 2008, Kronaizl took them up on their advice and enrolled at the University of South Dakota School of Law.

Kronaizl's small town connections quickly proved to serve him well.

John Blackburn, a client of Kronaizl's father, offered the law student an internship at his law firm in Yankton, not far down the road from the law school. Blackburn and his partner Mike Stevens were well known in the legal community across the state, both having served as president of the South Dakota Trial Lawyers Association.

"I could not have learned the practice of law from two better lawyers," says Kronaizl.

After cutting his teeth as an associate at Blackburn & Stevens for a few years, Kronaizl made the difficult decision to leave in order to find a position in Sioux Falls, where his wife, Morgan, had grown up and where the young couple wanted to raise a family.

When it came to finding a law firm in Sioux Falls that was a good fit, Kronaizl sought one with the same small-town values and sensibilities instilled in him while growing up in Scotland.

"For me, I always think God has a plan for everything," says Kronaizl. "It worked out perfectly. When I started applying, Lynn Jackson was looking for exactly the position I needed."

Lynn, Jackson, Shultz & Lebrun is the third largest law firm in South Dakota and one of the state's oldest. Founded in Rapid City after World War II, the firm celebrated its 75th anniversary last year. In 1987, it opened an office in Sioux Falls and expanded again in 2016 by opening a third office in Spearfish. The full-service firm now has 29 lawyers and has attorneys that in addition to South Dakota are licensed to practice in Wyoming, North Dakota, Minnesota, and Iowa.

The firm was looking for a transactional attorney in the Sioux Falls office to additionally address probate and trust administration, which was precisely the work Kronaizl was looking to do. Ironically, after his first year in law school, he had wanted nothing to do with contracts, but he found in practice that he could delve into contracts and become lost to the outside

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Kraig Kronaizl and his wife, Morgan, have two children -- Christian, 4-1/2, and 2-month-old Eliza.

world for hours.

"I really enjoy the minutia and detail of contracts and getting into them and trying to prevent the fights all those litigators want to get involved in," he says.

Kronaizl appreciates the culture and collegiality at the South Dakota firm, which he describes as strikingly different from the typical perception of large law firms.

"It is another small-knit, family-type community where we care about each other," he says. "We care about each other's families. We want to make sure we're looking out for each other."

Rather than operating under a competition-based compensation model, lawyers share work and are salaried. A management team determines salaries and bonuses.

"Our ultimate goal is not money-oriented," says Kronaizl. "It's client oriented. It's service oriented. It's what matters most to the client. And that fits my personality."

The model fosters a better work-life balance for everyone, says Kronaizl.

"I can find it hard to get away and separate work and life," says Kronaizl. "I've had colleagues who've helped me try to do that. They care more about me as a human than the bottom dollar."

They want you to make sure you take care of yourself so you can take care of your family."

Kronaizl's wife, Morgan, also has a law degree and works for the state's Department of Labor and Regulation Division of Banking. The couple has two children. Their son, Christian is 4, and their daughter, Eliza, is a mere 2 months.

"I've always wanted to be a dad so I make sure I do whatever my children want to make them happy and let them know their loved," says Kronaizl. "I've always had the mentality that my parents did everything for me, so I want to do everything for my kids."

In any spare time that he has, Kronaizl enjoys golf and watching sports, particularly football.

"I live and breathe football on Sundays in NFL season," says the ardent Minnesota Vikings fan. "I tell people I bleed purple

and gold."

Kronaizl's areas of practice include banking and financial transactions, business and real estate, trusts, estates and probate.

"When someone asks me what type of law I practice, I tell them I work in the areas you want to see an attorney for, not those areas in which you have to," he says. "That's what I love, that those areas of the law can get me involved in all the areas I have expertise in and put it all together in one collective unit."

And he's been busy, particularly preparing and reviewing business loans. Sioux Falls seems to be in a state of continuous boom. Population in the city's metro area climbed from 277,458 in July 2020 to 281,958 in July 2021. The 1.6 percent increase ranks as the 45th highest among all U.S. metro areas. Partially due to the lack of a state corporate income tax, the city is home to a number of financial companies and is a popular choice for forming trusts, and Kronaizl has seen the demand continue to grow.

The firm joined Primerus in 2020, and Kronaizl has found it a valuable resource. He appreciates belonging to a group where there is trust and loyalty among members.

"One thing I've learned, in my area of law, you have to deal with people everywhere," he says. "Primerus gives me a resource where I can tell clients, 'Don't worry about it. If you have an issue in this state, I have someone I can put you in touch with. I may have never spoken with them before, but I know I can trust them because they're part of this group we're a part of and they expect loyalty and trustworthiness from us so I assume we can expect the same from them.'"

Loyalty and trustworthiness are only two of the small-town values that Kronaizl tries to incorporate into his practice and are part of his attempt to redefine the stereotypical perception of a lawyer.

"We're considered counselors at law, and I take that word 'counselor' to heart," he says. "I want people to think of attorneys as somebody they can go to in order to get the best advice and know that they're on their side."



Kraig Kronaizl is an ardent fan of the Minnesota Vikings and admits to bleeding purple and gold. His father, Dennis, still holds season tickets to the team.