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# Newsmaker: From a family of firefighters, she puts out blazes in court

## Q&A

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*Karrie Clinkinbeard comes from a long line of firefighters in the Kansas City area, so it's not surprising that she found herself being pulled toward that line of work, even as a lawyer.*

*Clinkinbeard is a partner in the Kansas City office of **Armstrong Teasdale LLP** and one of only a handful of lawyers in the U.S. with a Certified Fire and Explosion credential. So even though she has never felt a desire to rush into a burning building, she's often there after the fact, sifting through the smoldering rubble with investigators. She's a certified instructor for the **Department of Homeland Security's National Fire Academy**, which provides training for fire and arson investigators. She's also the only woman on a 22-member panel for the **National Fire Protection Association**, which sets the qualifications for becoming an arson investigator.*

*Clinkinbeard's expertise and training recently helped her and her mentor, [Lynn Hursh](#), win a \$30 million verdict for **Missouri Gas Energy** in a furnace explosion case. It was the largest defense verdict in Missouri in 2014.*

## You grew up in a firefighting family?

My grandfather [A.T. Meyers](#) was in the fire service as the fire chief of Merriam, which at the time was all volunteer. He also owned [A.T. Meyers](#) and Sons bus company.

My dad (Dennis Meyers) followed my grandfather's footsteps and became a firefighter when he was 18, basically straight out of high school, starting as a volunteer in Merriam. He ended up in Overland Park working up the ranks to fire chief. He retired after about 30 years and bought into a fire services company, Conrad Fire Equipment, which sells fire trucks and equipment all over the region. Then he retired again. He got back into a part-time consulting role as assistant fire chief of Fire District No. 1 in Johnson County, which is in the New Century and Gardner area.

So I grew up around the industry and can remember when I was a kid going to the fire station to celebrate birthdays and things like that. It was very much a family environment with all the people at the

fire department. Now my nephew is a firefighter, and we're on four generations of firefighters at this point.

### **How did you end up in fire litigation?**

I started here at Armstrong Teasdale as a law clerk here while I was still in law school. They offered me a job, and I've been here for 16 years now. When I started, I had a really good mentor ([Lynn Hursh](#)), and he had done a number of cases that involved fires or explosions, chemical releases and electrocutions. So I started working with him on a variety of cases, but a number of them were fire-related cases. We decided to develop this fire and explosion practice group. We were already doing it but decided to work on our expertise further and really put our name out there as experts in fire and explosion litigation.

### **What part of your career gives you the most pride?**

I have a Certified Fire and Explosion Investigator certification. There are very few women attorneys with that certification. I also sit on the National Fire Protection Association 1033 board, which is the standard for professional qualification for fire investigators, and I'm the only woman sitting on that technical committee. It's something I'm very proud of. The legal and the fire industry is still very much a male-dominated industry, so I'm pleased to lend my perspective. It also makes me proud to know that my dad is proud of those things.

### **What drives you to travel across the nation providing free training to fire departments?**

It's about teaching them how to do their investigations, but then see it through deposition and trial testimony. I'll put them through an actual cross examination as if they were testifying on the investigation they've done and the conclusions they've reached.

They're testifying in a criminal case on their opinions that it's an arson, so it's their reputation and the department's reputation on the line, making it very important that they are prepared to testify. It's the same on the civil side. Even though they're not testifying for one side or the other, their investigation is being called into question. So we try to help them be prepared.

### **Is there anything people might find surprising about you?**

I don't think people see me as the artsy and craftsy type, but I take reclaimed wood from old barns and then make things out of it for fun. I paint sayings and signs on them. Whatever you can dream up. The most popular thing I make is the Maltese Cross for the International Association of Firefighters Union. Several firefighters asked me to make one for them.

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## **KARRIE CLINKINBEARD**

**Career:** Partner, Armstrong Teasdale LLP

**Expertise:** Fire and explosion litigation

**Education:** Washburn University, bachelor's in political science, 1996; University of Kansas, law degree, 1999

**Family:** Husband, Sean, and two children, ages 6 and 9

**Hobbies:** Arts and crafts with reclaimed wood; following her kids' sports teams; doing community volunteer work

James reports about banking, financial services and law.