

'76

Stephanie Nute JD '76

Marital Master
Rochester Family Division
Dover, NH



“As a member of the first graduating class, I recall with great fondness the exciting adventure of being part of a new law school, inspired by the visionary leadership and boundless energy of its founders, Dr. Robert Rines and Dean Robert Viles,” says Stephanie T. Nute JD '76.

“There were 100 members in the first class, 10 of whom were women, and most of us had been working in other careers before applying to law school. We were an eclectic bunch and because we were ourselves, we became good friends,” says Nute.

Nute’s first career took her to England where she taught English at Norbury Manor in London, after graduating from the University of New Hampshire (UNH) with a BA in English in 1969. She returned to the United States in 1971 to accept a post at Exeter High School, while attending UNH to earn a master’s degree in English. After teaching English for five years, she decided to follow her father’s example and become a lawyer. She joined her father’s firm, Nute & Nute, in Farmington, NH, as a partner.

“My dad was the quintessential small town lawyer and my constant model for honest, ethical practice, hard work and dedication to his profession, community, family and clients. Even now, although he is retired, people still call upon him for advice and guidance,” boasts Nute.

After developing a domestic relations practice, Nute decided to apply to become a marital master in 1981, after appearing before now New Hampshire Supreme Court Senior Associate Justice Linda Dalianis, who was a marital master at the time.

“I telephoned Chief Justice Richard Dunfey and asked how I could apply to become a marital master,” says Nute, “and he replied, ‘when can you start?’”

“The application process is much more rigorous now!” says Nute. “There are currently fourteen marital masters and, like our first class at FPLC, we are a unique and highly-bonded group within the court system. I have enormous affection and respect for my colleagues, a brilliant, funny and compassionate group, always supporting each other and completely devoted to improving the practice of family law in New Hampshire.”

“It is the responsibility of marital masters to hear divorce, separation, annulment, civil union dissolutions, parenting, child support and domestic violence cases in Superior Court and, in the Family Division, all those cases plus guardianships of minors, abuse and neglect cases and changes of name—in addition to post-decree contempt and modifications.”

“We try to help families through very difficult periods in their lives. Fortunately, we now have greater access to mediation and alternate dispute resolution and to the assistance of guardians ad litem. But we have a great need for more low cost support services, supervised visitation centers and access to legal services,” explains Nute.

“Our great challenge is in trying to address the needs of pro se litigants and in coping with litigants who have significant family dysfunction, substance abuse or mental health issues, but who have limited financial and personal resources,” Nute adds.

Nute’s lengthy career as a marital master for 27 years, also includes serving as the first woman president of the Strafford County Bar Association in 1985, an appointment by Governor Jeanne Shaheen to the Legislature’s Task Force on Family Law in 2003, and most recently serving on the Citizen’s Commission on New Hampshire State Courts.

“What a great gift Franklin Pierce Law Center has been to the state of New Hampshire,” says Nute, “and what a wonderful example of how dreams can be realized with imagination and determination.”

Nute lives in Lee, NH, with her husband of 27 years, Jimmy Hicks, executive vice president and principal partner in a Durham, NH, economic planning and real estate firm. Their son, Jordan, recently married and moved with his wife, Tara, to Helsinki, Finland.