

# SMALL BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT



## LEGALLY BLOND

When Debra Rodriguez and Heather Moretzsohn crossed paths in 2005, neither of them would have imagined that eight years later they would be law partners smack dab in the middle of the most exciting immigration reform since the Immigration Quota System was created in 1952.

Debra Rodriguez and Heather Moretzsohn (also affectionately known as “Las Gueras”) are the named partners in Rodriguez & Moretzsohn, P.L.L.C., a law firm which focuses solely on all types of immigration issues.

Board Certified by the Texas State Bar of Texas in Immigration and Nationality Law since 2007, Debra Rodriguez has been practicing all types of immigration law since 1998. She is admitted to practice law in both California and Texas and is the Former President of the Corpus Christi Bar Association, the Coastal Bend Women Lawyer’s Association and a Recipient of the Corpus Christi Outstanding Young Lawyer’s Award. “That was a long time ago.” She joked. “But it was an honor.”

Heather Moretzsohn has immigration in her blood. After obtaining her law degree, Heather Moretzsohn worked in a law firm with her father, James Stanton, in Honolulu, Hawaii practicing, well...immigration. Heather eventually moved with her family to Corpus Christi, Texas. Since then she has been the President of the Corpus Christi Sister City Committee where she set up a new Sister City between Corpus Christi, Texas and Playa Del Carmen, Mexico. Heather has been a Fulbright Scholar (Japan and Micronesia), a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar (Austria), and a U.S. National Security Foundation Scholar (Japan). When she ran out of scholarship opportunities, her father “hinted” that she should consider getting a job – “one that pays.” So, she worked in several State Department locations including the U.S. Consulate in Brazil and the Department of State in Washington, D.C.

So how did “Las Gueras” end up joining forces? Even though they attended the same high school in Hawaii, (Debra wouldn’t admit how many years between their respective classes) they didn’t meet until 2005 when Debra, a sole practitioner, hired Heather. After a five year period, they joined forces and opened their law firm which now has 4.5 attorneys (one is waiting for her actual license after passing the bar) and a dedicated support staff.

When asked why they enjoy practicing immigration law, several responses emerged: “Family unity is often at the heart of immigration cases. You are often fighting to keep the family together. If you help someone get citizenship – or even a work permit, you see their dreams come true. Going to the citizenship ceremony is still a very moving experience for us and we’ve been to a lot of them. It reminds us to not take our American rights and freedoms for granted. Many of our clients come from countries that do not have the basic rights we take for granted: freedom of speech, religion, and other basic human rights. They risk everything to start their lives over in the United States.”

Very often, law firms will only practice certain types of immigration cases, but this firm handles everything from work permits to deportations, and legal permanent residence to citizenship. The firm also services many businesses who find themselves in need of additional workers, especially in light of the Eagle Ford Shale development and a booming economy. I-9 reviews, international company transfers or placement of professional or technically trained foreign workers such as welders, off-shore workers, engineers, nurses, physicians, etc. are just some of the business related cases handled by the office.



Recent law changes and proposed legislation have made immigration more challenging and exciting. "This area is ever-changing and with the recent 844 page bill proposed April 17th, it will only get more confusing" states Heather. The legislation she is referring to is the new Senate Immigration Bill (SB744) called the Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Act introduced by the now famous "gang of eight" which is comprised of eight Senators: four Democrats and four Republicans. The Bill focuses on four main components: Border Security, Registered Provisional [undocumented] Immigrants, Employment Verification and an overhaul to certain non-immigrant visa programs. But even during a time of great change and challenge, "Las Gueras" find time to connect with the community. They recently sponsored a 5th grade Essay Writing Contest entitled "Why I'm glad America is a land of Immigrants." Winners from various schools in Corpus Christi competed for cash prizes (and

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bragging rights) and were recognized for their achievement by Mayor Nelda Martinez who graciously awarded them certificates. "It was a great opportunity to visit our local school and educate these students on the advantages of being a diverse community." Community involvement is a theme with this firm. Several employees have been actively involved in coaching High School Mock Trial Teams ("My team made it to the State finals TWICE – just saying..." smirks Debra), Heather is actively involved with the Sister City Committee as

well as the Downtown Rotary Club promoting international friendship and goodwill (hence, her marriage to a Brazilian), and other employees are encouraged to give back or participate in community activities.

"We feel very fortunate and honored to be able to work in such a dynamic community. We are excited to see what the future holds – both for our community and our clients."  
Vamonos Las Gueras!