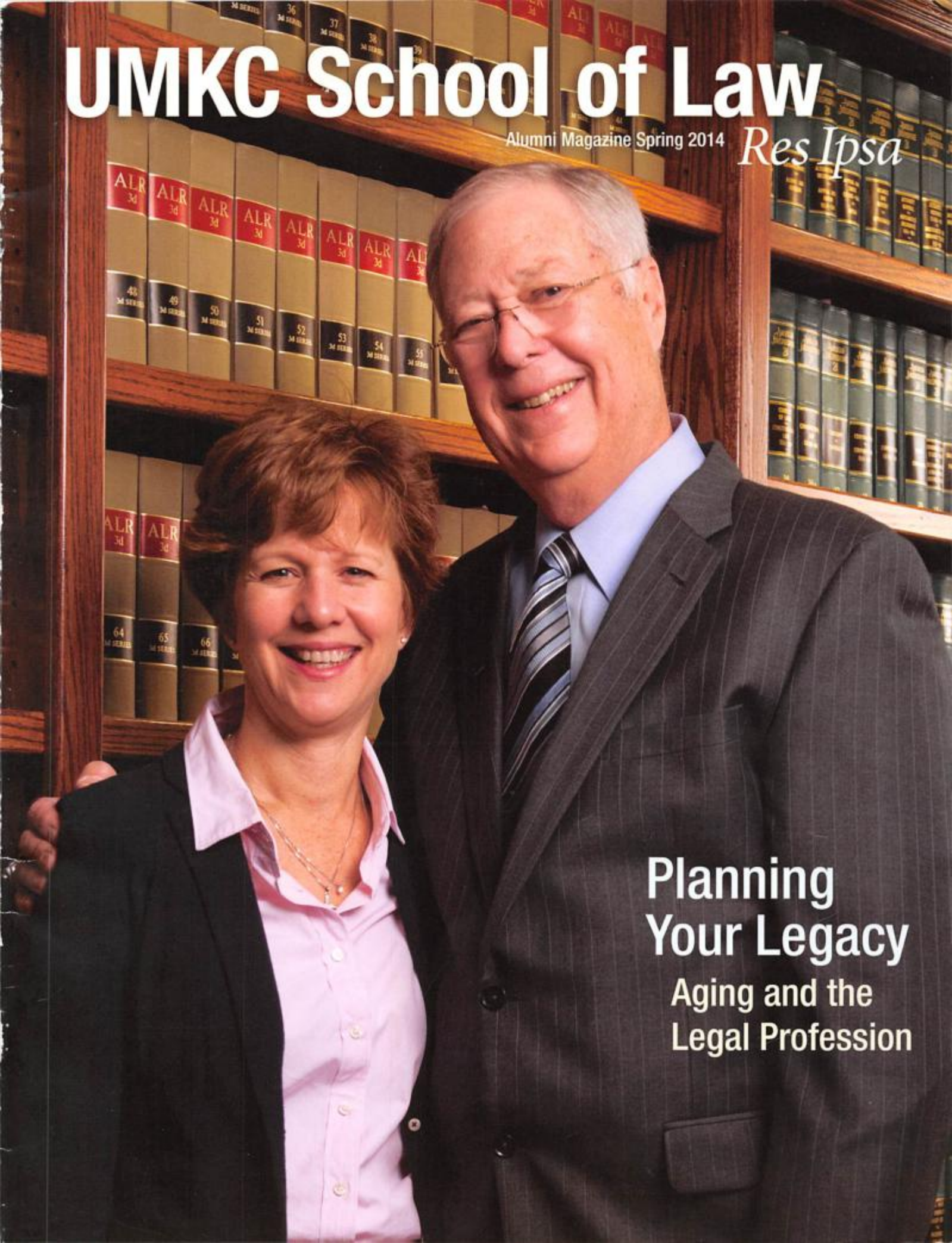


UMKC School of Law

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Res Ipsa



**Planning
Your Legacy**
Aging and the
Legal Profession

The road less traveled

Elder Law Pioneer Martha Brown (J.D. '81)

Martha Brown initially intended to be a legal services attorney. After graduating from UMKC, she began her career working with a small law firm that specialized in probate matters, handling the guardianship cases for the firm. As she built her practice, Brown slowly began working with Medicare and Medicaid matters. By 1994, she had an elder law practice, although at the time she was not entirely aware that's what it was.



A National Elder Law Foundation Certified Elder Law Attorney, Brown has now been practicing in elder law for more than 25 years. Her practice, Martha C. Brown & Associates, LLC, is located in St. Louis.

Brown recalls that when she began practicing, there were only four elder law attorneys in St. Louis and 10 in all of Missouri. The then nascent area of practice, which focuses on helping people navigate the countless issues that come with aging, was scorned by the traditional estate-planning bar, Brown says.

"Some estate planning attorneys thought elder law was a scam on the government," Brown says. "Others could not understand how representing the middle class could be profitable enough to support a law practice — let alone intellectually challenging."

Now more than 400 attorneys in Missouri belong to the Elder Law Committee of the Missouri Bar, including Brown. Elder law, which deals with issues like estate planning, long-term care and employment discrimi-

nation, has become a "hot" area of law — and also a crucial one.

As baby boomers age, experts expect the demand for elder law services to continue growing.

In the last 10–15 years, Brown's elder law practice has expanded to include special needs law. She now considers this area of law to be her greatest strength as an attorney and finds it "very satisfying to help someone with a severe disability improve the dignity and the quality of their life."

Brown works with families who are trying to help other family members, whether they are elderly or have special needs. Brown says she enjoys both kinds of work.

In 2008, Brown received the honorable Powley Award from the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys. The award is given to an elder law attorney who has demonstrated a commitment to promote, in the minds of the general public, a greater understanding of the rights and needs of the elderly and of people with special needs. She considers that

award to be her greatest professional achievement.

At 59, Brown is looking forward to her own retirement. Now that her two children are grown, she enjoys traveling and sailing with her husband. In the next year she plans to visit Peru and Cambodia to explore Machu Picchu and Angkor Wat.

As she reflects on her career so far, she has some advice to offer to those looking to become lawyers and those looking to practice in elder law.

"It is important as a young attorney to have an experienced attorney as a mentor," she says. "Learning to practice law has a steep learning curve and having a mentor is essential to becoming a good attorney."

Brown believes that elder law is a satisfying practice area because of the good she's been able to do. Her only regret is not discovering elder law sooner.

— David Engel