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After 5

City solicitor Jennifer Smout shares the dirt on her after work life

by Suzanne Boles

For lawyer Jennifer Smout every project has its own reward. And though the results don't always come quickly, long-term planning and a vision are essential. The 36 year old assistant city solicitor for the City of London has learned that with hard work, creativity and patience, more often than not the vision becomes reality.

"It's interesting because you can see what you do and how it effects what goes on in the community," she says about her work for the city over the past four years. "Some of the community projects that we're doing -- pools and arenas -- you see right from start to finish so you can really see what you do, how it impacts the community and the benefits that are derived from it."

There are few parallels between the reality of law practice and portrayals of the profession on TV, she says. "It really isn't glamorous. It's a lot of phone work and a lot of paper work. There's a lot of drafting, reviewing things, research and reading." It's demanding with deadlines, shifting priorities and increasing workloads. But she enjoys it.

Smout applies some of the rules of her profession to her passion -- gardening. There is planning and a vision of final outcomes. There will be herbs, to be used in her kitchen, and a wide array of colourful perennials, carefully chosen with a special project in mind -- a centerpiece or a decorative floral wreath she'll make for a friend's house.

Born and raised in London, Smout learned about gardening from her father. "When we grew up we had a house with a greenhouse and my dad was really interested in plants and flowers. We grew just about everything. My dad was patient. He'd show us how to plant seeds, make cuttings, re-pot plants and transplant seedlings."

Years later, she tried her hand at indoor gardening in her one-room apartment. The landlord let her use the yard outside where she shaped perennial gardens and experimented with a variety of plants. Today she has her own garden and her own home which she and partner, Gregg Barrett, purchased just over a year ago.

Though it isn't quite time to plant yet, Smout spends hours gleaning through seed catalogues, something she jokes about as being her addiction. And despite crisp temperatures outside, inside her house there's a sense that spring is always around the corner. Dried flowers hang in the kitchen, hyacinths nose from a ceramic pot on the windowsill and seedlings germinate on the back porch. She's planning this year's garden and looking forward to working outdoors again.

"With a garden you can plant something in the spring and you can get results very quickly." And in the winter "I still have some of my garden hanging in my house and some of it in my cupboard that I'm going to use with dinner tonight."