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Laguna!

LIFE & PEOPLE

Laguna's Nicole Anderson on family, community and what work/life balance means to her

Story by ELIZABETH NUTT
Photos by Mary Hurlbut



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Nicole Anderson

We're sitting in Nicole's pristine, beautifully decorated North Laguna office—which is as warm and inviting as the attorney herself—when I ask her about the photographs that will accompany this piece. I suggest that they be portraits taken at Anderson Law Group Inc., the thriving law firm she founded and runs today. But Nicole has a different idea.

“Can we take them at my home, with my family?” she asks. “It wouldn't feel right to have photos done without them present. They are a better reflection of who I am.”

The sentiment is quintessential Nicole, a bright and successful self-starter who, at the end of the day, is all about her family; Nicole is married to Laguna native Peter Anderson, and they have two young sons, William and Barrett.

But Nicole, in addition to working as a practicing attorney and spending quality time with her family, is active in the Laguna Beach community, and a devoted volunteer. I sat down with her to learn exactly what it is that motivates her, and how she balances it all.



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**Nicole and Peter Anderson with their sons, William (5) and Barrett (3)
Colorado—Where It All Began**

Nicole graduated in 2004 from Colorado College (CC), where she earned her Bachelor of Arts in International Political Economy and had the opportunity to study economics and international law abroad for a year at the London School of Economics.

During her freshman year at CC, she met Peter Anderson, who was studying geology and who happened to be a third-generation Lagunan. Though the two dated throughout college, they parted ways briefly to pursue graduate school opportunities. For Nicole, that meant returning to her home state of Michigan, where she earned her J.D. from Wayne State University Law School.

Nicole's father works in estate planning and business law, and one of her first jobs growing up was making copies in her dad's office.

"He's always been a mentor to me," says Nicole.

Following law school, Nicole clerked for the United States Attorney in Detroit, Michigan, and then served as a law clerk for the Honorable Judge Gadola, Federal Judge of the Sixth Circuit, as well as for Cline, Cline & Griffin in Michigan.

Ultimately, Nicole relocated to Laguna Beach, married Peter Anderson, and earned her Masters of Law from Chapman University School of Law in 2011. As for adjusting to life in Laguna? "I can't imagine living anywhere else," she says.

Anderson Law Group, Inc.

In 2008, Nicole was working as a partner at the Law Offices of Anderson and Le in Orange County when she made an important realization: the intense hours required of her as partner were not conducive to a healthy work/life balance.

"At that point, I thought to myself, 'Why am I doing this?' I wanted to become a mom, and I wanted more flexibility in my life," says Nicole.

She made the decision to start Laguna Beach-based Anderson Law Group Inc. in 2009, which presented to Nicole an incredible opportunity for growth, as well as a new standard for work/life balance.

"The firm grew slowly, but it was just me. And it's not just about practicing law—it's learning how to run a business. After doing it all myself, I truly respect self-starters, and as a business law attorney, I'm better able to help people navigate the process of starting their own businesses," says Nicole.

Today, it's a highly specialized firm that's dedicated to estate and business planning law. Roughly 90% of Nicole's clients are based in Laguna Beach, and she's found success largely through word-of-mouth referral.

Founding Anderson Law Group has enabled Nicole to keep her family at the forefront, to take vacations, and to inspire her all-female staff of four to seek a similar balance.

For Nicole, it also means entirely free weekends with her boys. She loves to bike down to the Farmers' Market on Saturdays, practice yoga, hit the beach, and explore the trails behind her family's Canyon Acres home during her downtime.



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The Anderson Family

And, of course, regular date nights are a must, too. She and Peter, an engineering geologist who recently founded his own company, can be found dining at local eateries such as La Sirena, Broadway, and 230 Forest.

“Peter is very involved, and *he* keeps the family running!” says Nicole.

Bettering Laguna for The Next Generation

A flexible schedule also frees up space for Nicole to volunteer her time to multiple community organizations. Giving back has always been a part of her life, and it was her parents who instilled that value in her, having led by example. Her father was president of their hometown’s community foundation for ten years, and her mother is a nurse who has volunteered her time at a community clinic.

Community service is essential to Nicole, and she simply can’t imagine seeing it any other way.

“I love Laguna. Without this town and this community I wouldn’t be where I am today. It’s so important to give back, and in the end you get way more than you give,” says Nicole.

She has dedicated her time to the Laguna College of Art and Design, where she served on the Board of Trustees from 2009-2014. And today she works with the Laguna Beach Community Foundation as a three-year member of the Board of Trustees.

With two children who will go through the Laguna Beach school system, Nicole has also taken an interest in supporting education-based non-profits. She serves on the endowment committee for both the Boys and Girls Club of Laguna Beach and SchoolPower’s Endowment.



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Nicole and Peter's eldest son William with Oscar, the family's Black Lab

Nicole is particularly excited about her volunteer work with an organization called NextGen, of which she's been a part for several years. NextGen is aimed at engaging the 'next generation' of Laguna Beach locals, and inspiring them to give back to and get involved with their community, especially as it pertains to playing a role in shaping Laguna's future.

"If we don't use our voices, they'll never be heard," she says.

Nicole helps run and host fundraisers and events for the organization, and she works to motivate younger residents to attend City Council meetings and get involved with Laguna's multitude of non-profit organizations.

Ultimately, the family-focused and hardworking Nicole wants to ensure that Laguna remains the wonderful place it is both for her own children, and for generations to come.

"I'm usually the youngest person on the boards I serve, so I'm working to engage younger generations to become a part of the decision-making in Laguna Beach that will affect all of us and our kids," says Nicole.