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## Private detective 'wouldn't trade work for anything'

By Meghan Dusek, Contributing Writer Jun 16, 2009

STILLWATER — The allure and mystery of the private investigative field has captivated audiences since the golden days of radio.

The 1980s TV show "Remington Steele" put a spin on the genre by depicting a female detective who, discovering that people are reluctant to hire a female investigator, pairs up with Pierce Brosnan to be the face of the operation.

But according to Stillwater, Minn.-based private investigator Julianne Mossak, being a woman in the field offers an advantage: "Few people expect a woman to be a detective, so it's a great asset in that regard."

Try that on for size, Remington Steele.

"Of the 300 licensed private investigators in Minnesota, only three are women," the full-time investigator said in a recent telephone interview. "I go undetected — I'm much more inconspicuous in certain cases, like in child custody cases."

Child custody cases are among the most common that she works on, along with infidelity, missing persons, deployment and discrimination cases.

Originally from West Lakeland, the Stillwater native got her start working with the Minnesota attorney general's office in enforcement. For licensure in Minnesota, 600 hours of experience are needed as well as continuing education every year. Mossak said the Board of Private Detective and Protective Agent Services regulates those requirements very strictly; for those interested in the field, she recommends gaining experience in a regulatory industry, as a police officer or in the military.

Mossak has established offices in St. Paul, Minneapolis and Stillwater. Since different states have different requirements, investigators must either obtain licensure in multiple states or build up a network of contacts across the nation, which Mossak has done. She credits this as one of the most important assets, in addition to building experience in the specialization.

"Most investigators have one or two specialties," she said, adding there that there are few "cookie-cutter" cases. "You're always using your mind to figure out how to complete a case."

That could mean anything from surveillance in a hot air balloon to sitting at a bar, watching bartenders to see if they're stealing money, she said.

Mossak identified one of the perks of the job as being able to choose her cases.

"It's like I'm always building a story, but never know the ending because I'm not the one writing it," she said.

Much of the information investigators compile goes to an attorney, who puts it together with their own information. Any evidence gathered from an unlicensed private investigator is inadmissible, another indication of why licensure is so important. Typical rates for unlicensed investigators are around \$40 per hour; a licensed investigator charges between \$60 and \$125 for their time, she said.

Mossak cited missing persons as the types of cases in which clients seem the most disillusioned.

"People hire me to locate people, but it isn't easy to find people," she said, ticking off methods like tracking cell phones and others that, though effective, are fairly time-consuming. "People expect information to come much faster."

Following people and conducting surveillance also deserves some clarification, she said. She uses two vehicles in surveillance cases to make the work easier.

"It isn't as easy as people think," she noted. "You have to make sure people don't see you, and not lose them at stoplights or anything. And it's very grueling at times. Just watching someone for hours and hours for just one thing to happen ... you can't turn your head or you might miss it.

"At times it's also dangerous, as we're dealing with people who may be carrying drugs or weapons."

Sometimes the dangerous party is the client, she said.

"Sometimes we get hired by stalkers," she noted. "I once testified against a client for stalking his girlfriend. If you ask me to locate someone, I'm paid up front, and once I locate the person, I ask if the client is allowed the information. If they aren't, I can't release the information."

Public misconceptions and job hazards aside, Mossak seems content with her chosen profession, and even welcomes the challenges associated with it.

"You never know what's going to walk in the door next," she said. "I wouldn't trade it for anything."

No Pierce Brosnan needed here.

