

Linn records its first 'collaborative' divorce

By Trish Mahaffey

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Jake Koller



Mary Chicchelly

CEDAR RAPIDS — Attorneys Jake Koller and Mary Chicchelly recently wrapped up their first collaborative divorce for a Linn County couple married more than 30 years. The process — less adversarial than some solutions — took a little more than a month to complete.

Koller and Chicchelly, along with about 10 other lawyers in Eastern Iowa, were trained in collaborative law last March.

This non-traditional way to divorce has been available in the Des Moines area for five or six years, but this is the first

a binding agreement to reach a settlement that works for both.

This process is designed to save time, money and emotional pain.

Koller, who practices with Simmons Perrine Moyer Bergman in Cedar Rapids, said he's seeing increased interest in the process from attorneys and clients. He already is working on another collaborative divorce, with a few others considering the approach.

"It's a great way to resolve disputes," Chicchelly, of the Seidl and Chicchelly law firm in Cedar Rapids, said. "If I could talk all my clients into this approach, I

More information

Visit the Collaborative Lawyers of Eastern Iowa's website at

www.collaborativeiowa.org

would do it. It's a more positive experience to have the client leave with a smile instead of being beaten up."

Koller said every divorce is different, but a traditional one with issues — such as the first collaborative divorce couple had — takes six to nine months to resolve. If the divorce goes to trial with a judge, the process takes up to one-and-a-half

years.

The collaborative process also costs a couple about half as much as the traditional process in attorney and court fees,

Koller said. Each client paid about \$1,500; a traditional divorce cost \$2,500 to \$3,500, he said.

Koller said not all the collaborative divorces may go this quickly. The first collaborative divorce did not involve child custody issues, but it did have other considerations to be worked out.

Chicchelly said the process makes more complex divorces easier.

In a collaborative situation, a couple would share an expert, if need-

ed, for financial services or mental health issues. The expert would figure out the best solution for both, instead of each hiring separate experts.

"It builds a trust, instead of breaking it down," she said. "There's more transparency."

Koller said this kind of divorce also is good for attorneys because they're on the same page, working toward the same objective — what's best for the couple as they divide their lives.

"It's not a big group bear hug, but it's less stress and anxiety," Koller said.

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