

Former federal prosecutor brings wealth of experience to a new position

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BY ALLISON DUNN / THE BLADE



Toledoan Ashley Futrell stands outside of her new law firm, Shumaker, Loop & Kendrick, on Monday, January 4, 2021.

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Toledo native Ashley Futrell has worked with some of the most respected lawyers at some of the biggest criminal-justice agencies across the country.

Ms. Futrell, 37, has an impressive resume of working as a Congressional staff member, trying nearly 30 cases during an internship at the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office, and overseeing hundreds of cases as a criminal prosecutor for the Manhattan District Attorney's Office.

But in 2018, Ms. Futrell packed up her belongings from her Brooklyn apartment and returned to northwest Ohio to serve as an assistant United States attorney in Toledo, where she prosecuted criminal cases including public corruption and white-collar crimes.

Many questioned why she would leave such experiences behind to return to Toledo, with seemingly less caliber and prestige. The answer was simple for Ms. Futrell: she was raised to be a public servant and she wanted to give back to her hometown community.

“Oftentimes in Toledo, I hear people say, ‘Play small.’ Or, they talk down about Toledo. But in fact, there are so many incredible leaders who are in Toledo and who were born in Toledo when they could live elsewhere,” she said.

She’s not done giving back or making new professional jumps in the legal community.

Last month, Ms. Futrell accepted a position with Shumaker, Loop & Kendrick to serve in its litigation, labor and employment, and white-collar defense and investigation practice groups.

“We’re very excited to have Ashley join the Shumaker team,” said Mark Wagoner, a partner and the firm’s litigation practice co-administrator. “Her accomplished background as a federal prosecutor, staff member in the U.S. Congress, and her community involvement make Ashley a great addition to our already deep branch of talent.”

Ms. Futrell says it was Toledo that helped pave the way for some of those extraordinary experiences.

During her undergraduate studies at American University in Washington, many of her classmates interned on Capitol Hill after class. She was also interested in such work, but she wasn’t sure how to get her foot in the door as a young college student from Toledo.

When she and her stepfather attended a Toledo Mud Hens game during a college break, she explained her dilemma to one of her stepfather’s colleagues, who indicated his sister worked on Capitol Hill. Ms. Futrell connected with the woman and received a personal tour of the U.S. Senate.

Soon after, Ms. Futrell was interning and later serving as a Congressional staff member, where she also worked to secure federal funding for urban parks and conservation efforts.

“That came from Toledo. That didn’t come from a contact in [Washington] or New York or Philadelphia. I always tell that story because they say, ‘All roads lead home.’ For me, this is like a full-circle moment in my life,” Ms. Futrell said.

She’s gained valuable knowledge of trying challenging cases, handling heavy caseloads, and working with victims to ensure they had just outcomes.

But she also worked with defendants to learn about what they needed from her as a prosecutor through the Inside Criminal Justice Initiative. She and other prosecutors collaborated with prison inmates about their cases and ways to improve re-entry efforts.

But on top of all that, Ms. Futrell brings something else to the table. She’s a young black woman serving in her hometown legal community.

In more instances than not in her prosecutorial roles, Ms. Futrell said she and the defendant were the only black people in the courtroom. It’s helped her be level-headed about treating all people — regardless of race, gender, religion, background, or crime — with respect and dignity.

“It’s a different lived experience as an attorney of color, especially for women attorneys,” she said. “There are different obstacles, but it’s also an opportunity because we bring our lived experiences to every conversation, to every boardroom — it’s an asset.”

Locally, Ms. Futrell has looked up other lawyers, as well as African-American women in the legal field, including Toledo Municipal Court Clerk Vallie Bowman-English and Vernelis Armstrong, the first black woman appointed to magistrate judge in Toledo’s U.S. District Court. She also has a network of colleagues across the country, as well as supportive relatives to help her along the way.

“Ashley can leverage an intuitive knowledge of strategies used to investigate and prosecute white collar criminal cases to stay one step ahead of the government and proactively present the most effective defense possible,” said David Axelrod, another Shumaker, Loop partner.

Outside of work, Ms. Futrell serves on the boards of directors for the Toledo Bar Association, the Toledo Opera, the United Way of Greater Toledo’s Women’s Initiative, Leadership Toledo, and the Toledo Alliance for the Performing Arts. In 2019, she was the recipient of Toledo’s 20 Under 40 Leadership Recognition Award.

She also enjoys traveling, playing basketball and supporting the Cleveland Cavaliers, dining at new restaurants, and spending time with her dog, Xena, a 6-year-old Schnoodle, a cross-breed between a poodle and schnauzer.

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