

# The Clarion-Ledger



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Mark Chinn of Jackson, who practices holistic lawyering, decorated his office with the client in mind. Chinn specializes in trying to make the divorce process less painful.

## Lawyering, the holistic way

■ Attorney looks to meet clients' various needs

By Maria Burnham  
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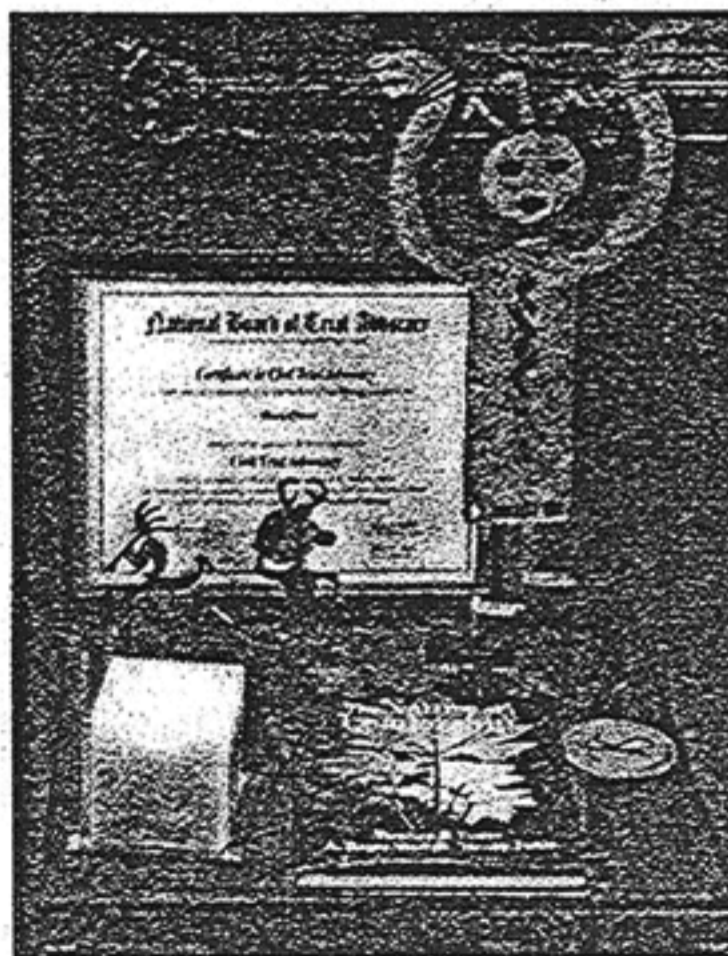
Mark Chinn meets his clients at the door and makes small talk as he walks them back to his office.

Lulled by classical music and bubbling fountains, Chinn's clients could easily forget why they're at his office until they sit down across a desk from him.

Then the reality of their situation hits them. They are getting a divorce.

Three and a half years ago, Chinn, a divorce lawyer in Jackson and former president of the Hinds County Bar Association, came to a realization.

"I thought, I must do something extra for these people, to help them



Rick Guy/The Clarion-Ledger

Mark Chinn uses artwork and candles to help set the mood in his office on I-55 North in Jackson.

through this process," Chinn said.

He is one of a growing

number of lawyers who are taking non-traditional approaches to their pro-

profession because of their discontent with business as usual.

Chinn wanted his clients to feel protected, to feel safe, to know they could survive the painful process of divorce.

So he began by redecorating his offices with the client in mind.

Out went the paneled walls and imposing mahogany desk. In came the plush chairs, couches and glass-topped conference tables.

The diplomas and awards were pushed to the side, displaced by the pictures of his family and the art nouveau prints on the walls.

Candles, plants and Bob the fish took the place of case files and law books.

But the changes did not stop with the aesthetics of the law firm. Chinn changed the structure of his practice.

See DIVORCE, 3C

From 1C

In addition to the divorce lawyer in his firm, Chinn hired a tax lawyer and a certified public accountant to help clients with the financial aspects of divorce. He brought in a marriage and family counselor to listen to clients' concerns and be with them through the divorce process.

"Every case has a legal side, an emotional side and a financial side. We, as lawyers, are trained in the legal side. While there are a few classes in law school for the accounting side, there are no classes for the emotional side," Chinn said. "So I decided to bring in professionals in those areas."

This "holistic" approach to law — the idea of treating all the needs of the client — is part of a growing global trend of alternative lawyering.

Bruce Winick, a law professor at the University of Miami in Florida, said lawyers are taking their practices in new directions because they are disgusted by what their profession has become and are tired of the negative reputation lawyers have.

"In general, there has been a lot of professional disillusionment and professional burnout in our field," Winick said.

"There is more substance abuse and alcoholism than in any other profession. There are higher suicide rates. Plus, we're the butt of all those lawyer jokes."

Clients believe lawyers are focused on the bottom line, Winick said. People are fed up with what they see as lawyering as usual, he said.

These new directions in law — therapeutic jurisprudence, preventive law, restorative justice, collaborative law, holistic law and creative problem solving — are all attempts by lawyers to feel good about what they do.

"It's a call to go back to the notion of a lawyer as counselor, to think of litigation as the last resort," Winick said. "Litigation should be avoided in all cases. It is a horrible, horrible, expensive thing."

Chinn has a similar outlook on the realm of divorce law.

"Mediation is growing in popularity and I think that's a good thing," Chinn said. "Going to court is a very expensive process. It's better for everyone involved if the parties can work things out for themselves."

Bill van Zyverden, a lawyer who

runs the Holistic Justice Center in Middlebury, Vt., and founder of the International Alliance of Holistic Lawyers, believes law has become too centered on anger and revenge, when it should be centered on justice and healing.

"Ten years ago when I started this, it was kind of laughed at," van Zyverden said of the holistic law approach.

Now the holistic approach has seeped into almost every state in the nation and into every continent in the world, van Zyverden said. Neither the Mississippi Bar Association nor the American Bar Association keeps records of those who practice alternative lawyering.

"It's about understanding people," van Zyverden said.

A client and a lawyer can win legally but lose emotionally if they go to court for the wrong reasons, van Zyverden said.

"The more we can put out positive emotions, the more it can percolate out," van Zyverden said.

For Chinn's Jackson firm, that means providing a sympathetic ear to clients.

"No one wants to go through divorce," Chinn said.

"But when they do, we want them to feel prepared for the what comes after litigation is through. We're trying to create a positive experience here."