

**Duriya Dhinojwala** Partner, BMD (Brennan, Manna & Diamond)

Duriya Dhinojwala is not someone who needs a road sign to tell her where to go, which is probably a good thing for her and for Akron, because few if any signs would have pointed her to the success she's found there.

Dhinojwala is from India, but the Bath resident has now spent most of her life in and around Akron. She came to the U.S. in 1990 and to Akron in 1995, moving with her husband, Ali, who is interim dean at the University of Akron's College of Polymer Science and Engineering, from her hometown of Mumbai.

"It was Bombay when we moved," she said, pointing out just how long she's been in the U.S.

While it was Ali's career that brought them to Akron, Duriya Dhinojwala insisted they not move again and quickly began building her own career here.

Initially, she was choosing between art school or becoming a lawyer.

"I got admitted to law school as well as the Myers School of Art, so I said, 'Now what do I do? I don't think I'm such a great artist,'" she recalled.

She thinks she made the right choice, adding, "I still think I'm a better lawyer than an artist."

Her colleagues apparently agree, and Dhinojwala is a partner at the 65-lawyer Akron firm of BMD, where she takes on both immigration and bankruptcy cases.

Her mentor, retired longtime litigation attorney Ralph Streza, isn't surprised.

"I have been (her) mentor for about 10 years. I probably learned more from her than she from me," he said. "Her keen sense of understanding people of all ethnicities, gender and backgrounds made her a very successful negotiator and advocate for our clients. Over time, I had no hesitancy to let go of complicated legal matters and watch her flourish. It was a relationship of mutual growth."

Dhinojwala said people tend to be best at what they love.

"I do," she said. "I'm very passionate about



my work. I've always said, 'The day I'm not passionate about my work, I'll stop doing it.'"

Today, immigration work is about two-thirds of her job, Dhinojwala said, and she's passionate about helping others navigate the system.

"It was a difficult scenario the last two

months. People with H1Bs (visas) getting laid off was a real problem. ... Employers had no idea how to deal with that," she said.

The work, however, was something she got into somewhat reluctantly, she said, explaining she didn't want to take the predictable path at first.

**The Dhinojwala file**

► **Favorite local spots:**  
Cuyahoga Valley National Park and the Lake Erie shore

► **Favorite food:**  
Hamburgers

► **Favorite place to visit:**  
Washington, D.C., or Iceland

"When I graduated from law school in 2002 — needless to say I'm an immigrant myself — and people just assumed I would go into immigration law," she recalled. "I had decided, 'No, I'm not going to do immigration.' So, when I first started, I was doing commercial litigation."

That's also served her well, helping her develop a specialty bankruptcy practice representing primarily secured creditors, often in complex cases.

But taking the predictable path doesn't seem to have been a theme for Dhinojwala. She never imagined she'd become a lawyer when she was young, nor did anyone else in her family.

"When we grew up, culturally, no one ever used a lawyer to do anything. I'm the first lawyer in my family. If you would dream of something, you would dream of becoming a doctor, but never a lawyer," she said.

Today, however, she said she's focused on continually becoming a better one.

She'll do it in Akron, too, from the sound of it. "We love it here. Akron is very much home," she said.

She visits India every two years, but after living in the U.S., she said the crowds there can be hard to take.

"It's a whole different world. ... Mumbai has 17 million people," she noted. "I think as an American now. Even when I go to India, I don't think of Mumbai as my home." — *Dan Shingler*

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