Adroge: From immigrant to Outstanding Young American

Almost 30 years to the day after she arrived in the U.S. from Argentina as a shy schoolgirl with her parents and four siblings, Sofia Adroge of Houston will be honored by the U.S. Junior Chamber of Commerce as one of 10 Outstanding Young Americans.

She joins a select group of 600 honorees over the past 65 years, including such diverse figures as John F. Kennedy, Henry Kissinger, Elvis Presley and Christopher Reeve. Then, as now, honorees are selected between the ages of 21 and 40.

The formal award will come at a black-tie awards ceremony Sept. 17 in Boston, where Adroge will be addressing a crowd of up to 900 dignitaries.

"I just want to get through the speech without crying," she says. "It will be a very emotional moment."

It was Boston where the Adroges arrived on Oct. 5, 1975, their possessions crammed into 14 suitcases and Sofia armed with just two years of English studies. The family intended to be away from Buenos Aires for only one year, during which her father, Dr. Horacio J. Adroge, would pursue academic medicine.

"But he knew this is where he wanted to raise his children," Adroge says, and they came to Houston.

For 25 years, her father has been a full professor at Baylor College of Medicine. He and her mother, Sara, have motivated their offspring to pursue advanced degrees and professional careers. "We're all doctors and lawyers," Sofia Adroge explains proudly.

Adroge, 38, is an attorney with the Houston office of Epstein Becker Green Wickliff & Hall, P.C., a national firm.

A commercial litigator who represents clients in business matters in state and federal courts and abroad, Adroge was cited by the U.S. Junior Chamber of Commerce for her efforts as a community
leader, philanthropist and parent.

Raised in southwest Houston, where her parents still reside, she graduated summa cum laude from St. Agnes Academy and won a scholarship to Rice University. Her magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa designations at Rice helped her earn another scholarship to attend law school at the University of Houston, where she again graduated magna cum laude.

In addition to handling a diverse docket of business and mass tort litigation, Adroge is a legal educator. As an author, her writing has appeared in more than 50 legal publications, and she has delivered more than 90 speeches in the areas of business torts, expert testimony and the management of complex litigation.

She has clerked for the Honorable Jerre S. Williams, U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals, and has served as an adjunct professor of law at her alma mater, UH Law Center.

In 1998, at the age of 31, she ran as a democrat for judge in the 189th District Court, but lost 52-48 percent to her opponent, Jeff Work. "I won on election day, but the early votes had defeated me," she says.

Adroge describes herself as "really apolitical," and admiration for her does appear to cross party lines: Her nomination for the Jaycees honor came from two high-profile Republicans, U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales and Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott.

While proud of her educational and career accomplishments, Adroge cites her family as her main focus. She and her husband, Sten Gustafson, and their three young children, Sloane, Schuyler and Stefan, moved to River Oaks from West University Place about two years ago. Her South American roots are important, too, she explains: "Our family still feels a very deep connection to Argentina."

Adroge has been profiled by Texas Lawyer as one of Texas' Top "40 Under 40," by H Texas magazine as one of Houston's top lawyers, and by The Houston Lawyer in "Houston's Lawyers Are Houston's Leaders." She is listed in Who's Who in American Law and Who's Who of American Women.

A graduate of Leadership Houston, Leadership Texas and the American Leadership Forum, Adroge volunteers with a number of education and arts organizations in Houston and statewide, including Girls Inc. of Greater Houston, the Houston Downtown Alliance, Leadership Houston, the Mexican American Bar Association-Houston, the Museum of Fine Arts Latin American department and Theatre Under The Stars. She has been named a KTRK 2005 "Woman of Distinction," a Houston Jaycees "Young Outstanding Houstonian," a Texas Jaycees "Young Outstanding Texan" and has been recognized by the city of Houston with a
proclamation of July 10, 2004, as “Sofia Adrogue Day.”

An ardent supporter of equality for girls and women, she says she wasn’t shy about pointing out to the Jaycees’ evaluators her concerns about the number of women who receive their award.

“It’s beyond sad that it’s taken so long for them to truly recognize women,” she says. Three of this year’s 10 honorees are women; the awards have been open to women since 1985. The selection process, which Adrogue describes as “somewhat grueling,” begins in the spring of each year. After the submission deadline, all nominations are forwarded to a panel of screening judges, and the top 20 point-getters become the finalists. The finalists’ nominations are forwarded to another panel of judges who rank their top 10 choices.

Each nominee’s accomplishments and contributions are also judged in relation to the Jaycees’ creed: “...that earth’s great treasure lies in human personality, and that service to humanity is the best work of life.”

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