

Couple trades Minnesota practice for Americana in Madison

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One of a Hoosier's favorite pastimes is to complain about the weather. But a couple of transplanted Minnesotans now living in Madison say, "Believe it or not, this is climatic paradise here."

Jeff and Melanie Flores opened a "mom and pop" law office in William "Bill" Prime's attorney's building on East Third Street Nov. 9. They left Minneapolis to escape the frigid weather and winter-long snow (as Melanie said); and the "rat race and freeways" that Jeff said were starting to drive him bananas.

The two young attorneys (he's 34, she's 32) settled in Madison because he and his family had been coming here on vacation trips since he was a child; and because Melanie fell in love with the town on her first trip here.

"We always came around the Fourth of July; we always saw the Regatta. That's Americana," said Jeff as the two sat in Prime's law library telling of their odyssey to the "sunny south," as they view Madison.

When Jeff brought Melanie here for the first time after their marriage, and they stood on a corner on Main Street so she could look over the downtown, Melanie said to her husband, "Jeff, this is perfect." Jeff Flores said he didn't understand to what his wife was referring for a few seconds -- then he knew: She had found her Shangri-La.

Returning home to Minneapolis, the Floreses and his parents made their decision: They would move to Madison, Ind., as soon as they could get their houses sold.

Jeff's parents' house went in about two days, Melanie recalled. Jeff and Melanie's took nine months before a buyer closed on it. "It was like we were having a baby," Jeff said.

Then, with their houses already sold, Melanie found out she was pregnant. The foursome went on with their plans for the move to Madison anyway. Nine months later, Ben H. Flores IV, named for Jeff's father, was born. He is now three months old. The couple also has a little girl, Alita, 3, who was named for Melanie's grandmother.

"It makes picking kid names very easy when you had someone in the family that meant so much to you," Jeff said.

Melanie said the couple realized they were taking a big chance in following their impulse to move to Indiana. "Quitting both your jobs, selling your house -- it's called homeless," she laughed.

their whole lives, "Getting farther away from the rat race with every mile -- I got such a sense of euphoria, it made me cry."

Once settled in Madison, Jeff began making calls to the local attorneys, seeking office space. "Several of them weren't too happy about another lawyer in town. But when I called Mr. Prime, he said, 'Come on down -- let's get acquainted.' "

The young couple and Bill Prime hit it off from the start, and he arranged for them to rent an office in his building. Jeff and Melanie began the practice of criminal defense; family law; and personal injuries.

Jeff said he is "very passionate" about criminal defense -- about the idea that every accused person remains innocent until proven guilty, and that every one deserves the best defense an attorney can give him or her.

Jeff Flores introduced himself to local judges Ted R. Todd and Fred Hoying.

"Judge Hoying asked me if I was interested in representing the local Hispanic folks. I said, 'Absolutely,' " he recalled. Flores is of Hispanic descent, and speaks fairly good Spanish, by his own description.

Jeff Flores said connecting with the people who are coming to a defense attorney, "and their lives have been ruined," is very important.

"People need to know if you have empathy for them," he said. "When you're sitting next to someone in shackles, who could go to jail for a long time, if you don't feel for them, then you're not worth your salt as an attorney."

When they moved to Madison, Jeff's parents acquired a residence on Logan's Point, in the Hanover area. Melanie said, "They called us and said, 'We just bought a house that's much too large for us -- but what a view! Come and live with us!' "

Jeff laughed that it was more in the nature of an order than a request.

While the young couple feared they might go through months of "twiddling their thumbs" waiting for clients in their new office, things have moved well for them. Young and idealistic, both seem to genuinely like being lawyers.

Jeff summed it up: "It's great to be a member of a profession that can do positive things for people."

Attorney's Jeff and Melanie Flores in their downtown Madison law office. The couple relocated their practice to Madison from Minnesota after falling in love with the community.

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