

## The Official Journal of Minnesota Women Lawyers



MWL Week of Service: May 2 - May 6, 2022

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## In This Issue: Commemorating MWL's 50th Anniversary

# About this Special Issue of “With Equal Right”

## From the MWL Publications Committee Co-Chairs

As MWL celebrates its 50th year, the Publications Committee set out to create this special edition of *With Equal Right*. Our intent was to celebrate the founders of our organization, along with all the amazing women who helped lead Minnesota Women Lawyers into what is today. The more we learned as we prepared this issue, the more we realized that the women who blazed the trail for us have incredible stories to tell. This issue highlights some of those stories.

Through interviews by MWL committee members and leaders, as well as friends and family of these MWL luminaries, we’ve tried to capture the grit, humor, and vision of the women who shaped MWL and the broader legal community. We’ve been amazed by how much change has occurred over the past five decades, but we’ve also come to better understand why some things have changed so little. MWL’s mission is as important now, as it was fifty years ago.

In this issue, you’ll also find lists of MWL Founding Mothers (women in attendance at the first MWL meeting on September 21, 1972) and MWL Presidents. To that end, we invite you to save this issue as a keepsake and a continuing resource, not just to ensure that these women are remembered for their great contributions, but also to know who to ask for more stories! Indeed, understanding our history is vital to MWL’s continuing, collective efforts.

With this special edition of *With Equal Right*, we hope that the interviews, stories, and recognition lists serve to be a reminder of how much can be accomplished, and how the mission of MWL – to advance the success of women lawyers and strive for a just society – remains relevant today.

Sincerely,

### **MWL Publications Committee Co-Chairs:**

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MWL is pleased to offer its Member Monday series again in FY22-23.

MWL Member Mondays are a monthly opportunity to engage with Minnesota Women Lawyers and its members, learn from legal community leaders, and build connections across the profession. This series will provide a consistent opportunity for MWL members and the statewide legal community to connect on topics of common interest, all in support of MWL's mission and values.

Visit [www.mwlawyers.org](http://www.mwlawyers.org) for information about all upcoming events.

# From MWL's 1st President to its 50th President: An Interview with Judge Patricia Belois

By Kristin Haugen



MWL Meeting at the MSBA Convention, June 1974 in Duluth. Attendees around the table, from far left: Irene Scott, Mary Louise Klas, Judith Oakes, Sue Sedgwick, Corrine Lynch, Charlotte Farrish, Mary Walbran, Rosalie Wahl, Patricia Belois, (unknown), Nancy Olkon, Sue Halverson, Camilla Reiersgard, and Cara Lee Neville

This year Minnesota Women Lawyers turned 50 and, like a fine wine, MWL has only gotten better with each passing year. As we marked this important milestone, we welcomed the opportunity to look back at our founding, our history, our struggles, and our significant accomplishments with an eye towards both celebrating all that makes MWL great and positioning MWL for another 50 years of success. Thank you for joining me on that journey, as I served as FY21-22 MWL President.

We owe much to our visionary founders, many of whom are featured in this issue of *With Equal Right*. I had the opportunity to connect with Judge Patricia Belois, MWL Co-Founder and first-elected MWL President (1972-1973), who reflected on MWL's origins.

PB: In the years before MWL was created, women lawyers faithfully sponsored "teas" for the women students at both law schools. As the number of women admitted to the practice of law increased, the tea format morphed into after-work gatherings and from there to the beginnings of MWL. I am delving deep into the recesses of my own memory into places that I have visited in decades and the details are covered with dust to be sure!

**KH: A core tenet of MWL is to build community. A desire to come together, connect, share experiences, and grow together was present from the very beginning and continues today.**

The central purpose which I recall being a sincere interest in continuing to mentor women law school students and to welcome them into the profession at a time when so many men already there were somewhat oblivious to the "startup" hurdles women faced. I want current members to know how pleased and proud the founders were of one-another's professional successes and ground-breaking achievements (particularly the "elder stateswomen" of the organization). They were pleased to be in positions to become known to women law students and young women lawyers and to share with them professional "possibilities." They bestowed friendship and encouragement that they hoped would provide to students and "young" women lawyers confidence and courage to move ahead in the profession.

**The practice of law has continually evolved with MWL impacting the profession.**

I have watched women attorneys matriculate through all the hoops to partnership in firms practicing in every area of the law, establish successful private practices, achieve appointment to the highest courts in the state and teach in the state's law schools. The fact that women lawyers do all these things is no longer a novelty, but rather an expectation. How wonderful!

**MWL is as relevant and vital today as it was 50 years ago.**

Membership in MWL continues to provide professional connections that can be priceless. The opportunity MWL offers its newest members the occasion to meet other women attorneys, both the "elders" but equally important one's peers, who share the profession. To meet each other, to learn from each other, and to advance each other in the profession together remains the essence of MWL.

**This has definitely been my experience as MWL has fit me, my practice and my needs over the years. As a large firm attorney, sole practitioner, in house counsel, professional coach, transplant to the Twin Cities, new parent, and more -- I've always found other MWL members who I can bounce ideas off of, learn from, and celebrate with. With this year's survey on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, MWL continues to lead the way in reflecting the community, instigating change, and establishing best practices.**

*Additional Remarks from My Interview with Judge Patricia Belois*

**What was your proudest moment with MWL?**

Toasting one of the first women lawyers in the state on the occasion of her 100th birthday!

**As a child or young adult, what career did you envision for yourself?**

I envisioned completing a graduate program of one kind or another and becoming a proficient in a profession that supported me, absorbed me, and that I loved.

**Tell us a bit about your career path. When did you begin your legal career and how did it evolve?**

I began my legal career in August 1970 as the Special Term Law Clerk for the Fourth Judicial District Court. There I became acquainted with the Hennepin County Public Defender at a time when that office had just been funded by a reluctant County Board. In 1971, I practiced with a small firm in Minneapolis and held a half-time public defender position which became full time in 1973. I practiced almost exclusively in the juvenile court and headed that division of the Public Defender Office until 1976 when I became a referee for the District Court and served in the Juvenile Division until I was appointed to the District Court bench in 1987. I sat on the specialty courts for the majority of my service on the bench until my retirement in 2011. I served as a senior judge for a number of years until I fully retired several years ago. I loved every minute of it, some minutes more than others, of course.

**Why did you go into law? Has your original reason for becoming an attorney withstood the test of time?**

The law chose me when the University of Minnesota Law School accepted my application and admitted me to the class of 1970. The relationship continues in its own way even until today. There has never been a dull moment.

**Looking back on your career, what has brought you the most professional satisfaction? What has kept you coming back to the legal profession day after day? What is your least favorite part about being a lawyer?**

Satisfaction came from knowing that I did the best that I could to help clients and to resolve the matters they were involved in. The satisfaction kept me coming back day after day, year after year, and decade after decade. The worst part was not being able to help resolve their matters the way they wished... some things were too broken to fix.

**What would you describe as your greatest career success?**

Getting the first full time job in August 1970 was the greatest career success because it paved the way for all that followed. The challenge was to persuade the department administrator who told me there was no point to complete an application because the position would never be given to a woman lawyer. I asked him to let me speak directly with the person who would make the hire. During that interview the judge whose clerkship it would be advised me that he would not hire me for that position, but only because he reserved his clerkships for night law students. Instead, because I had recently been admitted to practice, he offered to recommend me to be hired for a different clerkship with broader responsibilities and a higher salary. (He was also appalled by the clerk's statements. As it turns out he had young daughter he was propelling toward law school himself.) I was hired for the better job, and the rest became my history.

**In looking back on your career to date, what advice would you give to a new attorney, or even to your younger self?**

Be honest, be direct, be concise, and remember to say please and thank you.

**What is the best advice you ever received?**

I have a lifetime of good advice from very wise people starting with my mother and grandmother who advised something along the lines of "If you see something that needs to be done, do it. If not you, who?"

**Who most inspires you, either in or outside the legal profession?**

Ruth Bader Ginsberg and Roberta K. Levy – they remained charming in adversity. Outside my above mentioned mother and grandmother – nothing was impossible in their view. ■

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**ABOUT JUDGE PATRICIA BELOIS:** Judge Patricia Belois was MWL's first elected President in 1972. Before her retirement, Judge Belois worked as a Public Defender and was later appointed to the district court bench in 1987. She retired from the law in 2011.



**ABOUT KRISTIN HAUGEN:** Kristin Haugen is currently serving as MWL Past-President. Kristin is Vice President, Legal for LifeWorks, a global provider of technology-enabled human resources services. Previously, Kristin founded her own consulting business providing workshops and one-on-one coaching focused on business development, leadership, and diversity and inclusion. Kristin also practiced as a solo attorney and as a partner with one of Minnesota's largest law firms.

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**Women of Color in the Law:  
Summer Socials**

Join TCDIP and MWL for our annual Women of Color in the Law Summer Socials, a week of casual gatherings focused on building community

Between September 16th and 25th, volunteers will host small groups of 10-12 individuals in backyards, restaurants, and parks for camaraderie and conversation. At each conversation, we are pleased to center the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and Women of Color.

All women, non-binary and transgender people, and allies are welcome to join us.

Presented By: and



## Jennifer Robbins, FY 22-23 MWL President

*As MWL celebrates its 50th Anniversary, we are pleased to share the stories of 50 diverse women attorneys from across the profession and throughout the state during the coming year. Our goal is to feature individual experiences and achievements; to highlight the tremendous advancement of women attorneys across the profession (and acknowledge how much work is yet to be done); and to demonstrate the significant and meaningful impact that women attorneys have made, and continue to make, throughout Minnesota and beyond. Equally important, our goal is to learn about one another through our stories. To find commonalities, respect differences, and simply be inspired.*



Jennifer Robbins

*Jennifer Robbins is MWL's FY22-23 President and the Managing Partner of MADEL PA, where her practice includes representing Fortune 500 companies and individuals in high-stakes, complex matters both in civil litigation (as plaintiff and defendant), and in defending against criminal investigations and charges. She is a trial lawyer, repeat Super Lawyer, and a former Texan who has given her heart to Minnesota.*

### **As a child or young adult, what career did you envision for yourself?**

I wanted to be a marine biologist before I realized that I get seasick. Then I wanted to be a veterinarian before I realized that I would have to see animals in pain. In high school and college, my main challenge in choosing a career was how interested I was, and am, in so many different things. The word "career" sounds so final it still makes my palms sweaty.

### **Why did you go into law? Has your original reason for becoming an attorney withstood the test of time?**

While I was in college, I did an externship for my psychology major at a halfway house for women who had been incarcerated. As a result, and following a short detour, I concluded that I might be better able to help people by working with them in the legal system rather than as a psychologist after they were already sucked into a process they did not understand. I think my primary motivation for law school—helping people in difficult situations—remains true today, and I'm grateful for those opportunities. At the same time, I have seen up close how important our mental health practitioners are not only in the legal process (before, during, and after), but so helpful to everyone for life in general. I hope that our country, and our field, can end the stigma of taking care of our mental health.

### **Looking back on your career, what has brought you the most professional satisfaction? What has kept you coming back to the legal profession day after day? What is your least favorite part about being a lawyer?**

Things that have brought me the most professional satisfaction: seeing those who I have helped mentor or encouraged do well; having clients or colleagues trust me by referring others to me; knowing at the end of an argument or trial that I have done all I can to help my client; seeing a client turn to our team before a jury verdict and tell us that no matter what happens, they are grateful for our work—how kind is that?!? In addition to my practice, I had the privilege of being appointed to serve

as a Public Member of the Minnesota Board of Psychology for over four years. In that time, I felt immense satisfaction after board and committee meetings, particularly with the Complaint Resolution Committee, in knowing that after detailed preparation and what were important and often challenging conversations with other board members and licensees, I had done my best to be fair to both the licensees and to the public, and had succeeded in giving back to our State in some small way.

Least favorite part about being a lawyer: hands down the lack of control over my own schedule.

### **What is the best advice you ever received? Who gave you that advice?**

I have three pieces of "best advice" that I remind myself of all the time. First, from a college professor at the beginning of the year when my honors thesis would be due: "Don't worry. Work." It's so easy to worry yourself into paralysis or procrastinate by your favorite means (mine tend to be list-making and working on other things in the hope of clearing the decks—no, they are never cleared). But it always feels better when I work on The Thing instead of worrying about The Thing.

The second and third pieces of advice both come from my mentor and now law partner, Chris Madel: "Be yourself" and "have fun." The first time he told me to be myself I was so far down a path of not trusting myself and feeling like a fraud in a world of more senior lawyers I could never hope to successfully emulate, I was depressed, and anxiety ridden. It was shocking to be told to be myself. (This was before "authenticity" became a buzzword.) It changed my life in freeing me to find my own voice and to do my work well, as me. If not for that advice I have no doubt I would have quit law not long after.

Chris first told me to "have fun" right before my first opening statement in federal court. I don't know what my face looked like when he said it, but inside it was pure disbelief. (Really? You're telling me this now?) But I get it. Things can be stressful and important and fun. Every trial, he reminds me to have fun and now I remind others on our team, too. Juries have commented that they liked our team because it was clear that we genuinely like each other and our clients, even while we were clearly invested in, and working hard, for a win. Our war rooms are intense, focused, and fun. Now I can't imagine it otherwise.

### **What is the worst advice you ever received? Why was it the worst?**

The worst advice was from a junior (but senior-to-me) associate at my former law firm: "Never say no to work." To be clear, her advice was not "only say no to work if your plate is already full" or "say no only to the people who make you feel like garbage." Nope, just the blanket admonition. It still makes me angry to think new lawyers are subjected to that kind of "advice" when so many of us already struggle to say no and set boundaries to keep ourselves from burning out.

### **Why did you join MWL? Describe your past and/or current involvement with MWL. What impact has MWL had on you, personally and/or professionally? Is there a story you can share? (Memorable MWL moment, highlight or impact?)**

I joined MWL to connect with other women attorneys but didn't become truly invested until I participated in the MWL Leadership Project (a precursor to today's Leadership Institute). The Leadership Project helped me identify the reasons I felt out of place in the practice of law. And, more importantly, it taught me how to use the different ways I learn, communicate, and see things to contribute value to the teams I am on. It was so validating and empowering, and one more lesson in being myself at a crucial time in my early practice.

**What are your top three tips for success as an attorney?**

1. Try not to take things personally—it's easy to assume things are personal attacks when, in reality, it's often the case that everyone is simply trying to do their job in an adversarial system.
2. Give credit where it's due and hold yourself accountable for mistakes rather than finger pointing.
3. Make habits of staying active and nourished in the ways that keep you grounded.

**On the Lighter Side...**

**What single word or words (1-3) best describe you?**

Seeker, introvert, "neurotic empath"

**If you could have any career, what would it be? (Dream career – anything!)**

Writer

**What's one thing a family member or caregiver taught you that changed your life?**

My dad taught me to wonder (to ask questions and to sit with awe).

**What's one thing about you that surprises people?**

I love music but don't like concerts.

**Favorite meal or restaurant?**

Sift gluten free bakery

**What qualities do you most value in the people with whom you spend time?**

Kindness, honesty, humor, work ethic

**Do you have pets?**

One of the loves of my life was my cat, Ginsburg, who recently passed away. I named him after RBG.

**Favorite quote?**

From a Buddhist parable: "In life, we can't always control the first arrow. However, the second arrow is our reaction to the first. This second arrow is optional." ■

You could be the king  
but watch the queen conquer.

-Nicki Minaj, *Monster*

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# To Mentor and Support: An Interview with Justice Esther Tomljanovich

By Judge Richelle M. Wahi



Justice Esther Tomljanovich

I could not feel more fortunate to interview the Honorable Esther Tomljanovich for the 50th Anniversary of Minnesota Women Lawyers and this publication, *With Equal Right*. While there are countless numbers of Minnesota women who tirelessly advocate and work for equal rights in the legal field, Justice Tomljanovich is a true pioneer in the struggle, and a remarkable symbol of strength and determination. Justice Tomljanovich was not only a “Founding Mother” of MWL, but a mentor and champion of so many female judges and attorneys throughout the state and nation.

I had the good fortune to meet Justice Tomljanovich in 1999 during my first year of law school. And, as a first generation American and the first in my family to go to law school,

she quickly took me under her wing. Justice Tomljanovich introduced me to, and I became a part of, a group of women that are colloquially referred to as her “Coven.” Led by Justice Tomljanovich, this amazing group of women provide the much-needed support and guidance to achieve “With Equal Right.”

Justice Tomljanovich’s colleagues describe her as highly intellectual and extremely hardworking; incredibly softspoken yet decisively powerful. And the practitioners fortunate enough to appear before her have observed Justice Tomljanovich as tough, thoughtful, careful, compassionate, honest and kind.

This trailblazing warrior rose to the top of the legal profession despite enormous odds, and we can learn a lot from the way she has lived her life and devoted herself to a career that literally changed the path for women in the legal field.

## **RW: Justice Tomljanovich, tell us a little bit about why you decided to form or organize Minnesota Women Lawyers?**

ET: When I entered law school, and for a number of years after, there were a couple of women lawyer support groups. Women’s support groups are really important. There was a national association of women lawyers. I recall that Jeanne Coyne was an officer in that. I think Jean McVetty was as well; they were two of the early Minnesota Lawyers. But that kind of fizzled out. And then there was the Phi Delta Delta Legal Fraternity, originally that was made up of alums from the night law schools. The Phi Delta became the only organization of women lawyers.

In the very early 1970s when women started entering the profession in bigger numbers and wanted to really take part in, be an integral part of the legal profession, the Phi Delta Delta merged with a men’s fraternity. About half of our members, or maybe more than half, thought merger was a good idea. I do not believe we were asked if the merger should happen, the National Organization took the lead. Some of our members were quite happy. They thought they could merge into the men’s group and make a difference there. But some of us still felt the need for a women’s support group. So, we formed Minnesota Women Lawyers.

## **Describe the early days of MWL.**

At the beginning, MWL was not a great deal different from the Phi Delta Delta. MWL was still a place where we wore hats and white gloves and had fashion shows at our meetings. MWL was also a place where our accomplishments, no matter how small and insignificant, were celebrated. It was a place where we were safe, where a woman lawyer was safe.

It went on like that for a few years, then things changed quickly. Sue Sedgwick was elected to the Minneapolis Municipal Court. She was later appointed by Governor Rudy Perpich to the District Court. Then in 1977, Rosalie Wahl was appointed as the first woman to the Supreme Court, and I was appointed to the District Court. Minnesota Women Lawyers played a big part in those appointments. MWL interviewed the candidates for the Supreme Court. That was what it was all about – the first woman to be named to the Supreme Court.

MWL endorsed six of attorneys as qualified to serve. It was the first time that MWL exerted any real political clout. MWL, with its newfound power, became more professional. It had a much larger membership than the old Phi Delta Delta because there were so many more women lawyers in the 1970s.

MWL moved quickly from the original “ladies aid” type of organization to a real force for change. I think that happened with the successful endorsement of the first women to serve on the Supreme Court.

## **Wow, can you describe that process?**

I do not remember if we submitted our names to be considered, or if we were invited to be considered, or if a few of us just emerged as possible candidates. I do remember that Rosalie was approached and asked to apply, and I think I was, too. We were interviewed, they did some research into our backgrounds, and six of us emerged. I do not know how many were interviewed, I only know who emerged as possible candidates.

## **What would you like current members to know about the founding of MWL?**

I would like them to know that it was done primarily as an organization to support women. I would hope that they would continue that – supporting other women. Women often get accused of thinking that they really worked hard and battled their way up, and all other women should do it the same way. But that was not the mood or the purpose of the MWL. It was to be a support group and a mentoring group for women. I would hope they would bear that in mind and continue mentoring and supporting other women.

## **As a child or young adult, what career did you envision for yourself?**

I was raised in rural Minnesota, close to the Iron Range. I know lots of people have heard me tell the story that I decided to be a lawyer because I occasionally listened to a radio soap opera called *Portia Faces Life*. The heroine, Portia, was a lawyer. I thought I would like to be like Portia. I did not know any lawyers, I had never talked to a lawyer. I did not know if there were any real-life women lawyers. I decided I would be like Portia. I did not know what law schools might be available, I did not know anything about the law, but Portia gave me the nudge to be a lawyer.

## **Looking back on your career, what has brought you the most professional satisfaction?**

Being a trial judge was my favorite job of all time. It was so much fun. It was before there was so much security in the courts, so the lawyers would ramble into my chambers. You had all this personal contact, not only with the lawyers, but with the litigants and the lawyers’ clients. You could see if you did something good, you could see the impact. And you had a chance to really impact lives. That was my favorite job.

## **How do you define career or professional success?**

Not by financial success necessarily, or maybe not by financial success at all, as long as you have enough to be comfortable. I define it as having done something to change the world for the better for someone. If you only impact and improve one person’s life, you have done something important. So, I would put financial success on the sidelines and talk more about what you have done for people. And the people, you know, maybe the women you have helped a little bit, litigants that you have made more



*The MWL Celebration of Women on Minnesota's Highest Court, Fall 2018. Left to right: Justice Anne McKeig, Justice Margaret Chutich, Justice Esther Tomljanovich, Chief Justice Lorie Gildea and Justice Natalie Hudson*

comfortable in the courtroom. Those are the things that define success for me.

### **What was your biggest career challenge and how did you face that challenge?**

That is an easy question. When I went to the trial court, the second woman district court judge in the state, I had absolutely no courtroom experience. I had an experienced court reporter. We always joked that when I started, he and I went into the courtroom, he said, "I sit down here and you sit up there," and away we went.

So, getting some credibility as a judge was really important. After I was appointed, but before I went on the bench, I attended the four-week trial school in Reno. At that school, I had contact with other judges and some training.

At the time I was appointed, the Rules of Civil Procedure were being adopted. The Rules were new for everyone. The Rules were adopted on July 1st, and I was sworn in on September 1. Because they were new, there were all kinds of CLEs on the subject that I attended. There was a professor at the University who put out a series of tape recordings covering each of the rules. I carried those tapes around with a portable tape player everywhere I went. When I made beds, it was playing. When I cooked dinner, it was playing. When I drove anywhere, I was listening. So, I knew lots about the rules.

Then, when I went on the bench, I would get my files for the following day, take them home at night, and read everything. If I had a special term, I read every word. If there were cases cited, I read the cases. It was really lots of hard work. I was afraid I would make some silly elementary mistake that would go to the Supreme Court for all the world to see. I worked hard and I made a lot of friends, really good friends. Judge John Thoreen who was chambered with me in Stillwater was the main one. At the end of every day, he and I sat down and talked about the cases we had had that day. He would ask me what I thought about how he should rule. I know he did not care about my opinion, but that was how he taught me. He taught me to be a judge.

Even the lawyers helped. Jack Walsh, who was the public defender and Steve Muelberg, the prosecutor, were to become two of my very best friends. They appeared in my court nearly every day and did not want me to make a stupid mistake that they would have to appeal. So, if I missed something or forgot the "magic words," one of them would say "May we approach the bench?" They would remind me of what I needed to do. So, it was a lot of hard work, reading a lot of law, making a lot of friends and the tutoring of Judge Thoreen. It was fun though.

### **Tell me a little bit about that hard work and just the balance at home.**

My son and I would sit at the dining room table together. He would do his homework, and I would read briefs and prepare jury instructions. Jury instructions were one of the hardest tasks. The first time I instruct-

ed a jury was just incredible, because I had never even been at a jury trial. And, again, I called on my friend Jack Thoreen. In 1977, the jury instructions were not as thorough as they are now. When Judge Thoreen retired, he gave me his file on proposed jury instructions. There were hundreds of them. But it took some work to sort them out.

So, my son and I spent our evenings together, me doing my homework and he doing his. I did lots of reading on the weekends when there is always some extra time. I just stole the time I needed.

### **What's the best advice you've ever received?**

I cannot remember any advice about how to be a judge or a lawyer. The only advice I can remember came from a family court lawyer in the early Phi Delta. It was just personal advice, but I took it to heart. She said of marriage: "Share the same bed as long as you are comfortable, share the same room as long as you are happy, but never, never share the same checking account." Sound advice. If we had shared the same checking account, Bill and I would have been divorced 60 some years ago.

### **Well, do you recall what the worst advice you may have received?**

No, I do not. I had not thought about worst advice. Maybe I just did not listen.

### **Over the course of your career, what changes have you seen in the legal profession that have positively impacted or removed barriers experienced by the diversity of women attorneys across the profession?**

The number of women and their being active not only in the courtroom, but in professional associations like the Bar Association. And women proving themselves as good lawyers and worthy opponents. I can remember the first time I walked into my courtroom and there were two women lawyers on a case, and I did not know those women. In the early years, I knew all the women lawyers, and this was a great step forward.

Those numbers led to their acceptance. Early on when firms started hiring women, they hired one token woman, and that was all they needed. Then they started seeing their value, because those women worked harder and did a better job because they had to. And later, the number of women on the bench that led to a different perception of what women could do.

### **What barriers existed historically that you think still exist today?**

It is still harder for women. A man and a woman can do the same thing, or say the same thing, and the woman is being petty, and the man is being assertive and strong. The social roles of women and men still provide barriers, not as many, of course, but the role of women in the home. Most of us still do most of the parenting, most of the housework, those kinds of things leave less time for work and make it harder for women to devote as much time to their profession as men.

### **Given the current state of the profession for women lawyers, what gives you hope?**

Just that we are plodding along, and things are getting a little better, not a lot, but every year a little better. And I think women have become a little less defensive and pick their battles more carefully and fit in better – that gives me hope.

### **What most inspires you either in or outside the legal profession?**

It is hard to think what most inspires me. Probably it is when I see women being accepted, women assuming an equal role on the trial bench. When now a woman is appointed a judge, the big news and the headline is not necessarily that the appointee was a woman.

I think just that women are assuming an equal role in a lot of situations and being accepted. Not enough though.

### **What are your top three tips for success as an attorney?**

1. Work hard, work extra hard.
2. Do not sweat the small stuff. Do not take offense at every slight. Pick your battles carefully. Be sure it is important enough to finish the battle.
3. Smile. Smile a lot.

**If you could predict the future, what you would anticipate will change the most for women attorneys ten years from now?**

I do not think anything will change very fast. I have been a lawyer for nearly 70 years. Change has taken a long time. This is a slow process. I do not think much will change in ten years. There might be more judges. I hope there are more partners, especially senior partners, more equity partners. But it is still going to be at a snail's pace.

**How do you feel about the snail's pace? Especially since you were one of the MWL Founding Mothers and made such inroads and progress for females throughout the course of your career. How does that make you feel that we are still working at a snail's pace?**

I hate to say discouraged, but impatient. But I think it will continue at a snail's pace. I would like nothing more than to know that so much has changed, that women are so equal, the profession is so comfortable with women, and they have made so much progress that there is no reason for MWL to exist. But that is not about to happen for a long time.

It has taken almost 70 years to see the progress I have seen. When I got out of law school, no woman even thought of being a judge. Now half the trial court judges are women, but it has taken lots of years. It is over 40 years since I came on the trial court, real progress, but it has taken a long time.

**On the lighter side, tell us a little about what you like to do right now in your spare time.**

As of January, I am no longer on any board or have any professional position. In my spare time, I like to have company and parties. I like to work in my yard, or just sit on my porch. I like to cook. Now, I am just going to enjoy my friends and my family for the rest of my life. I will read lots and lots of mystery novels in my spare time.

**What is your favorite Minnesota destination, or any destination?**

My back porch in Lake Elmo. I like to sit there and listen to the birds and enjoy the flowers, hopefully with a friend or two.

**What is the last great TV show or movie that you watched?**

I do not like to watch movies. They take too long; I get too impatient. I think the last one I went to was Grumpy Old Men, so you can imagine how many movies I have gone to.

My favorite TV show is Call The Midwife. If I could revive a TV show from the past, it would be Boston Legal.

**What was something you did or experienced in the last year that provided extreme joy?**

The times that my son and his family visited. My grandson, Tony, is 18 today. My granddaughter will be 15 next week. They are my greatest joy.

At Christmas, the house is filled with family and friends and neighbors. It is overcrowded and noisy and wonderful. Now that my son and his family live in the United States, they make more frequent visits. They were here for my 90th birthday in November, when there was a party with family and young lawyer friends. They were here last week for the rather grand retirement party from the Medica Board.

My grandchildren make my life complete – hopefully not over, but complete.

**As you look back at your career, and the time you have had on the bench, both district court and Supreme Court, what is your biggest hope for Minnesota Women Lawyers?**

For the association or the women independently?

**For women independently.**

That they just enjoy their careers. It would be wonderful if everyone could have as much fun as I have had. The trial court especially was fun with all the people. I hope that they would have as much satisfaction as I have had in their careers, and that they would make as many friends as I have made during that 60 something years.

**Anything else that you would like us to know?**

Women are doing great despite the fact that there are still barriers. I am not completely satisfied with where we are, but I am so proud of what women have accomplished.

Women, just keep doing what you are doing, and we will get there eventually.

Thank you. Thank you. ■

**ABOUT JUSTICE ESTHER TOMLJANOVICH:** Justice Esther Tomljanovich was the second woman appointed to the Minnesota Supreme Court. She served from 1990 until her retirement in 1998. During her time on the court, she worked on women's rights, particularly women offenders. She also helped start the practice of the Supreme Court going on the road to hear cases around the state. She is known for her kindness, directness and sense of humor. She is also a Founding Mother of MWL.



**ABOUT JUDGE RICHELLE M. WAHI:** Judge Richelle M. Wahi is a judge in Minnesota's First Judicial District. Judge Wahi was appointed to the bench by Governor Mark Dayton in 2016, and presides in Hastings, MN.

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# Improving Access to Justice and Self-Care: An Interview with Judge Nicole Starr

By Jennifer Moreau



Judge Nicole Starr

I had the privilege of interviewing Ramsey County District Judge Nicole Starr, who has a gift of intertwining easy conversation with insightful observations about the judicial system and practice of law. With her relaxed manner—she was comfortably dressed in a hooded sweatshirt—the interview quickly felt like casual conversation with a friend instead of with a judge with a distinguished background.

After graduating from the University of Minnesota Law School in 2003, Judge Starr moved to South Africa for one year, where she clerked for a justice on the Constitutional Court of South Africa, the highest court of appeals. The court was tasked with construing a constitution that was only about 10 years old at the time, meaning that many cases were matters of first impression. Judge Starr then clerked for Judge Katherian Roe in Hennepin County and spent the bulk of her career in the public defender's office before she was appointed to the bench in 2015. She spoke fondly of her time as a public defender, expressing admiration for the "spirit and mission of that organization."

Naturally, our conversation steered towards Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, who was confirmed to the United States Supreme Court shortly before our interview. Judge Starr summed up her reaction: "This is such an incredible celebration and also such an incredible indictment of how systematically we've been excluding women and people of color from places of incredible power."

Judge Starr's clear passion for increasing access to the courts is what led to her involvement in the MWL Judicial Pipeline Initiative, which is "about the wonder and excitement of putting different points of view and different ways of knowing the world into positions of leadership." The Pipeline therefore creates opportunities for women and people of color, who do not often have someone offering that continual drumbeat of "you should be a judge." The Pipeline plants that seed and seeks to boost confidence in women and people of color. And once the seed is planted, the Pipeline offers resources to guide people through the selection process, which is transparent but not intuitive.

Judge Starr observed that Governors Dayton and Walz decided to change the face of the bench and have made concerted efforts to recruit and appoint judges who better reflect Minnesota. However, barriers remain. For example, the Pipeline Initiative wanted people to think of being a public servant as a true option, but due to significant law school debt, many are not in position to commit fully to public service, especially those from historically impoverished places. There is also a lack of judicial candidates from immigrant communities, as well as a lack of diversity in non-lawyer roles, such as legal assistants and court staff who are often the first face the public sees.

The desire to serve the community is universal—if barriers are removed, everyone would want to serve or be engaged in some manner. We need to look at the access points and figure out how we can continue to grow and innovate because courts are based upon public perception, upon public confidence that judges are fair and appears to be fair. Accordingly, "diversifying of the bench means diversifying of the branch."

Judge Starr brings these perspectives to her role on the bench. Every decision is a constant balancing act, between the law and her oath to the Constitution on one hand and her own personal fears and/or biases on the other. In her tenure on the bench, Judge Starr continues to evolve in her quest to do her job ethically and to resist the inherent pressures of moving quickly through cases or finding easy answers that may be structurally built in. She constantly reminds herself to consider different vantage points, be brave intellectually, and hold herself to the higher ide

als of justice which can become overshadowed by the daily mechanics of the criminal justice system.

Given that daily grind, the question logically arises if Judge Starr worries about compassion fatigue. She pushed back on that notion, as she often does, stating that the concern is actually system fatigue. It is tiring to see the system fail people, or see people get left behind or not get the right services. It is difficult to see people fail, or even see people die, such as when a person in a treatment court program overdoses.

Due to the trauma that many face in this line of work, Judge Starr pointed out the necessity of self-care: "This is hard work; this isn't a grin-and-bear-it situation." Self-care can take many forms, such as attending therapy, getting a massage, reading, or, as Judge Starr enjoys, listening to "weird podcasts about medieval history." Whatever the method of self-care, we all need to take time to stop work, turn off our devices, and rejuvenate. Judge Starr shrewdly pointed out that people are great at telling others to get self-care, but we are not good at taking our own advice. She therefore started telling herself to do what she would tell her best friend in the same situation; for example, if she would tell her friend to take a nap, Judge Starr knows that she needs a nap.

It is perhaps no surprise that if she could advise herself as a new attorney, Judge Starr would say, "Go to therapy." Therapy is not just for those in crisis and should instead be seen as the opportunity to check in with ourselves. Lawyers and judges can do incredible things, but we see people at their most awful or stressful moments, who ask us to do heroic things for them. We often engage in high-conflict behavior and in really intense work, and therapy provides a space to practice solid mental health hygiene. Just like we change the oil on our cars to keep it running, therapy is maintenance to keep ourselves running. Therapy provides an outlet for these high-stakes emotions, so that we do not inadvertently use those around us as an emotional outlet. The public, lawyers, and litigants rightfully do not want to deal with an unstable and unhealthy person; they deserve the very best level of service.

Judge Starr's emphasis on self-care, as well as her zeal for expanding access to the courts, showcase ways that we can do things better and smarter in the judicial branch and in the legal profession as a whole. Her enthusiasm is motivating...and may even inspire me to check out a podcast on medieval history. ■



"You Can Be a Judge" Seminar at the MWL Conference for Women in the Law, Spring 2016. Left to right: Vildan Teske, Judge Nicole Starr, Judge Pam King, Lidya Makonnen, Lee Sheehy and Judge Ann O'Reilly

**ABOUT JUDGE NICOLE STARR:** Judge Nicole Starr is a judge in Minnesota's Second Judicial District. Judge Starr was appointed to the bench in 2015 by Governor Mark Dayton.



**ABOUT JENNIFER MOREAU:** Jennifer C. Moreau is a shareholder at Barna, Guzy & Steffen, where she handles a variety of civil litigation matters and also advises employers on issues that arise in the workplace. Jennifer is a Co-Chair of the MWL Publications Committee and a mentor in the MWL Student-to-Attorney Mentoring Program.

# Focusing on the Common Good: An Interview with Justice Natalie Hudson

By Deborah Autrey



Justice Natalie Hudson

An old criminal law professor of mine used to say, “A man must know his limitations.” But Justice Hudson is not a man, and she has proven time and again that limitations there may be, but for her, they are only temporary. Justice Hudson is a pillar of who we at MWL strive to be rolled into one powerhouse of a woman. I was honored to interview her, and even more so to share this interview with you all. May her life inspire your own.

**DA: What made you decide to go into the law?**

NH: I actually wanted to be a veterinarian, and then after looking at the math requirements, decided against that. Instead, I thought I’d be a social worker. While I was looking into

social work, I had a cousin who was in law school at the time. He and I frequently talked about what he was doing and his classwork. That’s what really triggered my interest in the law. I realized that for the things I wanted to do, the social and political change that I wanted to make, the law was a better vehicle than social work. Those conversations with my cousin are what lit that fire for me.

**How did you get involved with MWL?**

I served on the Advisory Board while I was a judge on the Court of Appeals. Like most women, I joined because of the strong advocacy that MWL was engaged in. As women, we have a unique voice that needs to be heard and articulated. Our issues are unique and MWL was in the forefront of these issues, advocating on substantive matters for women in the profession. The organization has blossomed over the years and has been and continues to be involved in so many different areas that impact the profession for women.

One thing I remember from my time on the advisory board is that we always started our meetings by going around the room and sharing our successes or joys from the last month. It was so empowering, encouraging, and uplifting. You got to hear what other people were doing, and as is often the case for women, the discussions usually included what was going on with our families. It was a place to share the ups and downs of the profession, including the occasional slights that had come your way. Most of all, it was a place to be affirmed. I think that’s such an important part of the profession for all attorneys; but especially for women because historically, we have often been marginalized. It’s about the “sistering” that theologian Renita Weems talks about - being there to encourage one another. Although we’re all highly accomplished professionals we still need that encouragement along the way. MWL has provided that for me over the years.

**What is sistering? Where did it come from?**

It comes from a book called “Just A Sister Away”, written by black feminist theologian, Dr. Renita J. Weems. The book analyzes the lives of women in the Bible and how they interrelated with and learn from each other; and offers lessons we can learn and benefit from as women today. Dr. Weems discusses the power of sisterhood and mentorship; encouraging each other to occasionally step back from the limelight so that your sister can shine. It’s important to recognize that when we’ve reached the pinnacle of our profession, we don’t always need to be the one out front. Instead, we need to encourage, embolden, mentor and train up our younger sisters--- the next generation of women lawyers – by giving them opportunities to grow and excel. Her message is a global one for all women. I find that book very empowering on so many levels. And it really speaks to what we need to do, and what MWL has done so well over the years, which is helping us to be sisters to one another, both emotionally

and in the substantive practical work that we do in the organization and in the profession

**Women are very hard on ourselves. We tend to accept things that maybe our male counterparts would not accept. If you could give any advice to women about being kind to yourself, any kind of suggestion, what would that be?**

I was talking to a female attorney recently about a conflict she was embroiled in, and she immediately assumed it was her fault. As women, we do that. We go there. We have to work hard at giving ourselves some grace. But then also move to the objective place where we say, “I thought through this, I’ve objectively analyzed my actions, my role, and it isn’t me.” It takes us a while to get there. Of course sometimes it IS us. And we have to own that and take responsibility for it. But I think oftentimes, we’re very hard on ourselves. And that’s why every woman needs a good “kitchen cabinet” -- two or three women you can be yourself with, that you don’t have to pretend around. Women that you can let your mask down with and be vulnerable. A space where somebody will say, “No, you did the right thing. It isn’t you,” And conversely, confront us – with love – when we’re wrong. The more we reaffirm others and get affirmed ourselves, the more satisfaction we will find in our personal lives and in the legal profession.

**What’s the best advice you’ve received?**

The best advice I ever received came from former St. Paul Mayor, George Latimer. He was Mayor of St. Paul from 1976 -1990 and was known as “Mr. Saint Paul,” because he was such a popular Mayor. He later became the Dean of what was then Hamline Law School, where he hired me as the Dean of Students. While working as the Dean of Students, a serious issue arose, and I was asked to make a split-second decision about the proper course of action. I decided to think on it for a day but was questioning my hesitancy. I mentioned it to Dean Latimer and he told me: “If somebody is pushing you to make a big decision, and won’t give you time to think about it, your answer should be ‘no’. You may miss out on things occasionally, but it’s better than being rushed into a decision that you’re not ready to make. If people aren’t willing to give you time to think it through, say no, and you will not regret it.” I have cherished and followed that advice throughout my career because it finally permitted me to believe it’s okay to say “no,” or “not now.”

**If you could predict the future, what in it do you see that gives you hope?**

We are in such troubled, partisan times, but coming out of the George Floyd tragedy and all of the social upheaval, people of all races, ethnici-



The MWL Celebration of Women on Minnesota’s Highest Court, Fall 2018. Left to right: Justice Anne McKeig, Justice Margaret Chutich, Justice Natalie Hudson, Chief Justice Lorie Gildea and Rita Coyle DeMeules

ties, political and social affiliations, banded together to say that we are better than this as a community and a society. Even folks who have been sitting on the sidelines for a long time have begun to stand up and act; recognizing that democracy is not a spectator sport. It is fragile and requires constant caretaking by all of us. We have a long way to go, but if we can focus on the common good, and embrace the idea that we can succeed as individuals without marginalizing others, our communities and our state will be the better for it.

I'm also encouraged by the state of the legal profession. I continue to think the law is a change agent, and thus we as lawyers play a pivotal role in bettering our society and community. By virtue of our education and training, we understand the levers and mechanisms of the legal system, and thus have an obligation to use that knowledge for the betterment of our society. Minnesota lawyers have historically fulfilled that obligation and I am confident they will continue to do so. ■

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**ABOUT JUSTICE NATALIE HUDSON:** Justice Natalie Hudson currently serves as an Associate Justice on the Minnesota Supreme Court. Justice Hudson was appointed to the Supreme Court in 2015 by Governor Mark Dayton.



**ABOUT DEBORAH AUTREY:** Deborah Autrey is an associate attorney at Nilan Johnson Lewis PA. She currently serves on MWL's Board of Directors, as well as co-chair of the Diversity & Inclusion Committee, and the Publications Committee.

The graphic features a dark blue background with a blurred image of a person's hands typing on a laptop. At the top center is the MWL logo, which consists of three stylized white figures under a sunburst, with the letters 'mwL' in a red circle below. Below the logo, the text 'INTRODUCING' is in white, followed by 'THE MWL EXCHANGE' in large, bold, white capital letters. Underneath that, it says 'CONNECT WITH MWL MEMBERS TO ENGAGE AND CELEBRATE OUR DIVERSE COMMUNITY OF WOMEN LAWYERS'. At the bottom, it reads 'VISIT THE MWL EXCHANGE AT COMMUNITY.MWLAWYERS.ORG'.

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# A Seat at the Table: An Interview with Judge Cara Lee Neville

By Nancy Williams



Judge Cara Lee Neville

**NW: When did you make the decision to go into law?**

CN: I grew up in Cannon Falls, Minnesota, and wrote my first paper on "I want to be a lawyer" in ninth grade. In those years, girls weren't lawyers, and the only lawyer I actually knew was my best friend's father. I really didn't know what lawyers did, except that the only time my father, who was a businessman, ever needed help with anything it was when he needed to talk to a lawyer. As an only child I assumed that I was going to take over the business, so rather than hiring lawyers, I would shortcut the process and become one.

I always joke and say I never got my fill of Nancy Drew mysteries. In law school, I started in county attorney's office, as a file clerk, just so I could be

in the courthouse. I became a law clerk, and then an Assistant County Attorney.

**After your time at the county attorney's office, you became a public defender, then moved into your position as a judge. Were there any positions that you thought were more important than others?**

I'm the kind of person - I'm always happy doing what I'm doing at the time I'm doing it. So, I enjoyed being in the County Attorney's office. You feel like you're doing good by helping victims. It's very important work. Then I participated in an exchange program, started by the ABA around the country, where as a prosecutor you would leave your desk on Friday, take your personal items from the desk, but leave your files and everything else there. On Monday you reported to the public defender's office and picked up new files. Then, a public defender would take their personal items and sit in your office for six months. So, you really had a chance to see what it was like on both sides. I never tried a case the same way. It made me a better trial lawyer. I did the exchange, and I went back being a county attorney. Then, the chief Public Defender called and offered me the job as the first woman supervisor in the public defender's office. I supervised other lawyers, plus tried my own cases. It was also important work. Thereafter, I was appointed to the bench. It seemed like a natural progression. I was very fortunate.



The MWL Holiday Benefit, December 1996. Left to right: Judge Cara Lee Neville, Judge Tanya Bransford and Judge Beryl Nord

**Were there any positions or aspects of your career that brought you more satisfaction than others?**

I liked them all. I really loved being a judge. You could be hearing a motion on a corporate breakup in the morning and pulling a jury on a murder case in the afternoon. The intellectual stimulation - bouncing from one to another was energizing. An extern shadowed me at work one day and said "you sure have a lot of cognitive switches during the day." It's kind of like multitasking with your brain all day. I found that really fun.

**Is there any part of your job that you'd say is your least favorite part about being a lawyer or being a judge?**

No. I love being a lawyer. I love being a judge. I think lawyers are the greatest. They do so much good that people never know about but they just never get the recognition. We just have lousy PR. I wouldn't want to do anything else.

**Could you talk about your current role?**

I do alternative dispute resolution, primarily mediation locally, nationally and internationally. I started Benchmark National ADR LLC and Benchmark International ADR LLC in 2012. I have two mediators who have joined me. One, a woman lawyer who works primarily on the west coast and in Asia. The other, a woman lawyer in Washington DC admitted to the bar in six states and as a Solicitor in England. Both are past chairs of the ABA section of international law.

ADR is not only very important locally but also in many places around the world where people do not have timely access to justice. In many countries, judges have thousands of cases on their docket. They can't possibly try all of them.

I've traveled to many places around the world where people do not have access to justice that they can trust. There's corruption. ADR gives them an opportunity for resolution.

**Shifting gears - What led you to start MWL? What made you decide that that was the right time to get MWL going?**

They found me. I was in law school in 1972. I was invited to a woman lawyers' event. There I was, a student just in absolute awe of what was going on. I had never met a woman lawyer before. When MWL was starting, they just kind of grabbed me to get involved. Then they urged me to run for student body president, and all of a sudden, there I was, the first woman student body president. I really cared about MWL and its mission to support women in the law.

**Can you describe the early days of MWL?**

I have kind of a silly memory. I remember being elected treasurer - I was pregnant with my first son and put on bedrest. I remember being in bed with a telephone, a recipe box full of recipe cards for each member of MWL. I called them to ask for their dues and what committees they wanted to be on. There weren't that many of us, so I got to know everyone very well at that point. The camaraderie and mutual support were very important for all of us.

**Are there any specific impacts that MWL had on your own personal/professional career?**

It gave me an opportunity for leadership and to serve as an officer in MWL as well as the chance to get to know most of the other women practicing at the time. MWL gave me a network of personal and professional friends and a sense of confidence.

Before I could finish going up the MWL ladder, I was nominated to be in line to be the first woman President of the Minnesota Trial Lawyers Association. I talked to the other women lawyers, and they said it was more important for us to get a foot in the door of a traditionally all male legal organization. So, regrettably I stepped out of line at MWL, and became President of the Minnesota Trial Lawyers.



*The 50th Annual Meeting Celebration, June 2022. Left to right: Allison Cole, Sara Jones, Trudy Halla, Judge Cara Lee Neville, Judge Jacquie Regis and Julie Ritz-Schlaifer*

**Over the course of your time with MWL, how have you seen the organization impact women in the legal profession?**

MWL has provided many opportunities to women for leadership positions. We got involved with judicial appointments, which was extremely important, and led to hiring more women law clerks which boosted their careers as well. It has given women lawyers a powerful network as well as visibility, confidence, support, and camaraderie.

**Where do you see MWL going in the next 50 years?**

The first question really is whether we will have a need for MWL. I think it will still serve as a base of support for women. Even though we are increasingly moving into positions of influence, we still share many common concerns.

For instance, look at the parenting committee. I was a young mom trying to raise 2 sons and work full time. There's a lot of things you need to share with someone who is in the same position as you who understands things like the everyday pressures and problems you are facing. It really helps the woman lawyer to know (a) they're not alone, (b) they have common problems and (c) they're able to help someone else. They can also help others up the ladders of success, whether in their law firm or organizations, and share common practice problems experienced by women. I believe there will still be a need for MWL.

**Why do you think law students and new lawyers should get involved with MWL?**

It gives them a sense of security. It gives them opportunities that they may not have in the broader bar. It's not exclusive from the broader bar – I think one can do both. Each fills a different need and a different purpose and a chance to meet colleagues that they're going to be practicing with for many years. It gives them mentors, formally or informally. It provides connections for professional mobility and friendships.

**How do you think the legal industry for women lawyers may change over the next 10 years or so?**

I believe it will become more diverse and women will continue to rise to the top of the profession. Women shouldn't, don't and won't tolerate harassment. Women will continue to prove they are exceptional in the law. The fact that they are exceptional in the law means they are eventually going to be the managing and equity partners they deserve to be.

Although it feels very incremental at times, it's headed in the right direction, and picking up momentum.

**Over the course of your career, what changes have you seen in the legal profession that have positively impacted or removed barriers experienced by the diversity of women attorneys across the profession?**

Women feel they can expose bad behavior and harassment more often. They have the power to take stronger stands on issues. Having more diversity in every way has been a benefit to the profession. Diversity in every sense of the word.

When I started practicing, I wanted to be a trial lawyer - there but there were very few women in the civil bar who were trying cases. There were five women that anyone could identify trying civil cases. If you really wanted to learn your trade and become a good trial lawyer, you became a prosecutor or public defender to get trial experience. Now you see many women in the courtroom. Women transactional lawyers also found it hard to get a seat at the table.

People often ask if being a woman was a barrier when trying a case? Not with the jury. People were not used to seeing a woman trial lawyer. They may have been waiting for me to fall off my high heels, but I had their full attention all the time because I was a unicorn. I was something so unusual that they had to keep watching. And as a trial lawyer, if you can keep the jury's attention that long, that's pretty good.

**What most inspires you, either in or outside the legal profession?**

What continues to inspire me is seeing more women rising to the top of our profession and seeing the good all lawyers do. Lawyers protecting civil rights, womens rights, voting rights. Organizations like MWL, ABA and MSBA promote and give opportunities to lawyers to perform good work for society and pro bono services by lawyers. Lawyers who go to other countries at their own expense – helping lawyers endangered because they are doing their professional duties representing their clients. It just makes you very proud to be a lawyer and especially proud to be a woman lawyer. ■

**ABOUT JUDGE CARA LEE NEVILLE:** Judge Cara Lee Neville is the President of Benchmark National ADR and a former Hennepin County District Court judge. She is also an MWL Founding Mother.



**ABOUT NANCY WILLIAMS:** Nancy Williams is an associate at Faegre, Drinker, Biddle & Reath LLP. She is also a co-chair of the MWL Publications Committee.



# Blazing Trails: Reflections from Judith Oakes

By Judith Rush



Judith Oakes

Judy has always been an inspiration to me, from the time I was an 18-year-old with a few weeks of secretarial training and I went to work for Judy's law firm, to a conversation we had just earlier this year. Judy co-founded the first women owned law firm in the State and was representing women who had been discriminated against in their jobs – a top journalist at a local newspaper, a flight attendant at a big airline, a police officer for a local city. Her partner was the first woman labor arbitrator in the state. The firm was run on egalitarian principles such as the idea that everyone in the law office could readily answer a telephone, whether they had attended law school or were a green secretary, and each had something to contribute to the organization, which included having a voice at

monthly office meetings.

Judy blazed trails that none had dared before her. She was one of very few women in her law school class, and the only woman who graduated from law school with her class. She suffered many indignities in law school from her classmates, some who would suggest that she was taking the space of a man who should have been there instead. Also later from employers, who suggested many reasons not to hire her. She could have been a secretary, they supposed. It seems quite fitting then that Judy's work protecting the rights of women and others from discrimination was on the forefront of this area of law, and it was written about in a book called *Sue Your Boss*. Without question, she was a successful practicing lawyer for 50 years, advocating on behalf of clients (both paid and unpaid) and on behalf of the legal community, through her bar association efforts. Although there are many stories of Judy having to put up with a whole lot of difficulty, there are many more stories of how she thrived, succeeded, and effected change.

Judy recently shared the story of how she had become an adjunct professor at William Mitchell College of Law. She was aware that the lawyer who was teaching "Welfare Law" (which it is no longer called these days) was leaving the position. So she approached the Dean and asked him if she could teach the course. She had worked at the Attorney General's Office and knew her stuff about the topic. He agreed and she took on the role. Then, because she was an adjunct, Judy received a number of books



The MWL Wahl Leadership Lecture, Fall 1997. Left to right: Justice Rosalie Wahl, Judge Susan Miles and Judy Oakes



MWL's 47th Annual Meeting, Spring 2019. Left to right: Tina Syring presenting the Myra Bradwell Award to Judy Oakes

from publishers, including a new book on "Women & the Law," which was being introduced in law schools around the country. So Judy proposed to the Dean that William Mitchell should be teaching Women in the Law, and that she was available to teach it. Again, the Dean agreed and Judy ended up teaching the first Women in the Law course at William Mitchell. She said she just happened to secure those opportunities because she knew the Dean, but I know better. Judy saw a strategic opportunity, took initiative, and was willing to speak up.

As one of MWL's Founding Mothers and Past-President, Judy shared that she so appreciated how Minnesota Women Lawyers allowed her and other women lawyers to be part of a group of like-minded women lawyers. This was so important since women lawyers were often isolated in law firms and the practice in general. Having an opportunity to be together allowed her and others a place where they could be themselves. Her relationships with her MWL colleagues have meant the world to her. ■

**ABOUT JUDITH OAKES:** Judith (Judy) Oakes has blazed the trail for women lawyers around Minnesota during her more than 50 years of practice. In 1974, Judy and her colleague, the Honorable Judge Harriet Lansing opened their own firm, the first women-owned law firm in the State. She was also a principal at J Oakes & Associates from 1980-2008, and more recently, joined Rogness & Field, P.A. several years before her retirement. During her many years of practice, Judy has been a champion for those who faced discrimination in their workplaces, and later serving clients in family law matters. She has taught at both William Mitchell College of Law (now Mitchell Hamline) and the University of Minnesota Law School. Judy guided many a colleague along the trails she has blazed as a mentor to many law clerks, associates, young lawyers, and law students over the years. She has lent her expertise by publishing in the field of family law and presenting at Continuing Legal Education programs throughout her career. Judy earned her reputation as an honest, ethical and zealous advocate for her clients and was a certified trial specialist and recognized "Super Lawyer." Judy led MWL as President from 1974-1976, chaired MWL's Appointments Committee from 1976-1978 and its Endorsement Election Task Force from 1997 to 1998. Judy's service to MWL was recognized with the Service to MWL Award in 2001 and 2007, and the MWL Myra Bradwell Award in 2019.



**ABOUT JUDITH RUSH:** Judith Rush recently became mentor relationship manager of the Mentor Externship Program, having served as director for more than ten years at the University of St. Thomas School of Law, and focuses on her ethics and professional responsibility practice after many years of teaching and volunteering in lawyer regulation and lawyer assistance. She first met Judy when she was hired to work for Judy and her partner Vi Kanatz.

# A Strong Voice: An Interview with Judge Harriet Lansing

By Laura Arneson



Judge Harriet Lansing

## LA: Memories of 50 years ago and the founding of MWL:

HL: Before MWL was founded and while in law school at the University of Minnesota, Judge Lansing was encouraged to join a national legal sorority [Phi Delta Delta]. But the proceedings at the meetings were supposed to be kept secret. Moreover, to join, the women had to make “a pledge not to discuss anything that went on at the meetings.” Judge Lansing recalls that this restriction gave her an “uneasy feeling.”

In contrast, it seemed to Judge Lansing that it would be “a good idea “for people to get together who had common interests and common challenges with what they were doing.” In addition, she says, “law school had alerted me to the fact that

there were going to be challenges out there in terms of acceptance of our professional capabilities. And that we would probably need positive reinforcement from similarly situated people.”

Judge Lansing remembers thinking that it was a good idea to have “an organization for mutual support” but she was not persuaded that the sorority concept was what would achieve those goals.

She also recollects meeting Rosalie Wahl during this period and recalls that “Rosalie was interested in having an organization” of women lawyers because “she understood the value of communities of interest working together to overcome difficulties and challenges.”

## Other memories of 50 years ago:

“At the time ... we were working together with a small group to organize a women’s law firm.”

Before MWL was founded, Judge Lansing had been working as the first woman attorney in the St. Paul City Attorney’s Office. (She also noted that years later she was appointed as the City Attorney – which was “an interesting transitional experience.”)

Judge Lansing recalls enjoying the job with the City Attorney’s Office; however, she was not getting to do the work she’d been hired to do. She had accepted a position in the City Attorney’s Office to do work related to regulations for environmental protection, a continuation of some work she had done lobbying the legislature along with fellow law school classmates Tom Johnson, Howard (“Howie”) Vogel, and Michael (“Mike”) Wolff, working on the Minnesota Environmental Rights Act. But, after the attorney who trained her at the City Attorney’s Office ended up staying in Minnesota instead of moving to Florida as planned, “it turned out there wasn’t an opening after all.” So Judge Lansing was doing prosecutorial work and appellate work instead of the environmental work she’d been hired and wanted to do.

She remembers at the same time “getting a sense that it was not exactly a welcoming world with a lot of men attorneys in the office and only one woman attorney.”

Thus, around the time MWL was founded, Judge Lansing and a group of other women had decided to start a women’s law firm. Initially there were four women: Galen Wells (who was still a student at William Mitchell), Kathy Mikucki, Judith (Judy) Oakes, and Judge Lansing. Later they were joined by Eva Caperton and Suzanne Flinsch.

So, they “got the financing [and] figured it out.” The firm found “wonder-

ful offices in the Park Square Court Building. And we even figured out how to get some serious clients.”

Having MWL as a “forum for exchange of ideas” as well as a means for additional assistance in finding clients was a big draw for these women. For example, Rosalie Wahl was “terrific” at “getting the information out that such a law firm was available,” and she sent them clients. On the other hand, Judge Lansing recalls, “there were other people sending us clients who were essentially using us as a method of getting rid of difficult clients or people they thought could not pay. . . . That was a steady stream – so we learned a lot about all sorts of things, including community service. . . . Those were interesting times!”

## On the number of women attorneys in 1970:

Judge Lansing was born and grew up in rural Wisconsin and went to a one-room country school. She recalls “there weren’t a lot of lawyers in the area where I grew up” and she didn’t personally know any lawyers. Before going to law school herself, she “wasn’t aware of how few women lawyers there were in the world.”

While she was in college at Macalester, some of her professors thought she would be a good candidate for law school because, as she recalls “I was interested in philosophy and government and other subject-matter areas where they saw an intersection with law.” But it didn’t ever occur to her to “ask whether there were other women who were lawyers.”

So, she says, when she showed up to law school at the University of Minnesota and there were only ten women out of a class of about 260, she had “a sense of shock.”

## Memories of the early days of the organization and the meetings:

Judge Lansing says the early MWL meetings were “informal . . . casual, friendly.” The meetings provided opportunities for the members to be “encouraged by each other’s narratives.”

She says that when she was working as a prosecutor for the city, there were “such extraordinary reactions from judges and from other lawyers. So we all had to somehow exorcise these things by telling them to friends and sympathetic listeners.”

She also recalls getting strength in the early meetings from women like Rosalie Wahl and Susanne Sedgwick [who was later her first woman colleague on the Minnesota Court of Appeals] because these women “had



MWL President’s Reception, Summer 2011. Left to right: Megan Hertzler, Judge Mary Vasaly and Judge Harriet Lansing

“had been in this fray before us and they knew from experience that we all needed mutual encouragement.”

Judge Lansing also recalls that from the outset, MWL had a broad range: “Rosalie [Wahl] and Sue [Sedgwick] . . . had led very active social and political lives, with lots of interests. So we had discussions about books and all sorts of other things. . . . The organization ran across a broad arc – and it still does.”

**On what she wants current members of MWL to know about the founding of the organization:**

Judge Lansing emphasizes that it was important when MWL was founded and remains important today to help other women and men, even those who are supportive of women in the profession, to understand the purpose of an organization like MWL

When MWL was founded, Judge Lansing recalled encountering “some pushback” from her friends who were men lawyers. “They thought this was not a good idea for women who were trying to become part of a system in which they were such a minority to want to segment themselves off as a group.”

And, she says, sometimes it was “hardest for the men who were very supportive of having women in the profession. Because they felt like they were being excluded by virtue of not being able to come or to fully participate in an organization where the meetings were made up mostly of women. . . . But we resolved that by allowing men to become members and also by recognizing that some of our greatest supporters and allies were our husbands and other male friends.”

To respond to these occasional doubters, Judge Lansing emphasized the need “to have people bonding together to strengthen systems.” She noted that “women have a great deal in common and some of it involves balancing the responsibilities of family and children. Some of it is also understanding the challenges of breaking through traditional structures to obtain positions that women historically had not been able to obtain.” Having an organization where women can share these experiences serves a purpose and can play a role in preventing the “fragmentation of our institutions,” an issue of great concern for Judge Lansing in our current times.

Judge Lansing also noted that organizations like MWL continue to play an important role when women begin to lose ground they feel like they have already won. She recalled that when she was on the Gender Fairness Task Force with then-Justice Rosalie Wahl, Justice Wahl would often say, “the difficulty is not that we have to fight these battles and win, it’s that we have to keep fighting them and keep fighting them.”

**On the changes to the legal profession that make her feel the most hopeful:**

Judge Lansing stated that it’s “been exhilarating to see the speed with which women have chosen law as a profession” as well as “how they have done very well in positions across the board” and in many leadership capacities.

She also finds it heartening to see more women in government and on the United States Supreme Court and remarked on the “extraordinary poise and knowledge and grace” of then-Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson during the recent hearings.

She noted the importance of women on the U.S. Supreme Court for the profession. Judge Lansing had the opportunity to go to conferences with and get to know Justices Ruth Bader Ginsberg and Sandra Day O’Conner and other women judges at all levels. She recalls it “was always exhilarating to see what they were doing and the amount of energy” they put into their work and the effect they could have when they were “all standing together on issues.”

**On what she would like to see over the next 10 years:**

Judge Lansing says she is hopeful for “a continued evolution, without the repetitive falling back”; that women reach a place where they can “rest easy or at least rest easier.”

She also says she would like to see more women in “decision-making roles” and “strong political positions.” She says there “just aren’t enough women in the power positions and in the governmental leadership.” And, although “we have wonderful Senators in Minnesota” and a “wonderful woman lieutenant governor,” Minnesota has “not had a woman governor – so we could do that!”



*The 50th Annual Meeting Celebration, June 2022. Left to right: Justice Esther Tomljanovich, Judge Harriet Lansing and Justice Margaret Chutich*

Finally, Judge Lansing emphasized the importance of women “having a voice” in the establishment of processes and procedures. In recalling the role that she and Judge Susanne Sedgwick played in establishing the processes and procedures of the Minnesota Court of Appeals, she noted that they represented a third of the first set of judges. As a result, they were in a position to make substantive contributions, so that the resulting processes had a wider diversity base which provides a broader segment of perception and representation that encourages trust and contributes to institutional integrity.

Judge Lansing looks forward to continuing to “see women throughout the [legal] system as teachers, leaders, as people who are making changes and differences, and having a strong voice.” ■

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**ABOUT JUDGE HARRIET LANSING:** Judge Harriet Lansing was one of the founding members of Minnesota Women Lawyers in 1972 and was the recipient of the Myra Bradwell award in 2003. After graduating from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1970, she worked as a private practitioner in a small firm (the first all-female law firm in Minnesota), a prosecutor in the state courts, a part-time public defender in the federal courts, an appellate attorney, an administrative law judge, the City Attorney for St. Paul (1976-1978), a trial court judge in the Ramsey County Court (1978-1983), and, for 28 years, as an appellate judge on the Minnesota Court of Appeals (1983-2011).

During her tenure on the court, Judge Lansing was also involved in legal and judicial education, serving as an adjunct faculty member of New York University Law School’s Appellate Institute for Judicial Education for almost a decade, serving on the adjunct faculty of William Mitchell College of Law, Hamline University Law School, and chairing the University of Minnesota Law School’s Board of Visitors. Since her retirement from the court, she has continued her legal work, focusing on issues relating to state law and international law. From 2013 to 2015 she was the President of the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws. In 2015 she became a Fellow of the European Law Institute and was the keynote speaker for the Institute’s Annual Conference and General Assembly in Vienna, Austria. In 2018 she also delivered the keynote speech for the Institute at its annual meeting in Riga, Latvia. From 2015 to 2018 she served as a member of the United States delegation to the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law on Enforcement of International Commercial Settlement Agreements.



**ABOUT LAURA ARNESON:** Laura Arneson is Intellectual Property Counsel at Beckman Coulter Diagnostics. She is also a co-chair of the MWL Publications Committee.

# It Took a Village: An Interview with Judge Mary Louise Klas

By Barbara Klas



Judge Mary Louise Klas with her daughter, Barbara Klas

Mary Louise May Klas was born in St. Paul on June 5, 1930. She was the older of two daughters of an Irish-German milkman father and a first-generation Austrian mother. As a child, Mary Lou knew she wanted to be a lawyer but this ambition didn't seem practical when she graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the College of St. Catherine in 1952. She worked in various office secretarial jobs until she finally followed her instincts and enrolled at William Mitchell College of Law (then the St. Paul College of Law) in 1956. It

was there she met fellow classmate, Daniel Klas, the oldest of nine from Wabasha, Minnesota.

As Mary Lou says, "We are both first-borns. He's Protestant; I'm Catholic. He's Pisces; I'm Gemini." Worse yet, as Dan would later quip, "she's taller." Clearly, the odds were against them, but after Dan invited Mary Lou on a first date movie of Ingrid Bergman and Cary Grant in *Indiscreet*, the rest is history. The two married in 1958 and just two years later in 1960, the couple had earned law degrees and produced two of their eventual five children. In early 1970, Mary Lou and Dan eventually launched their joint practice of family law. Mary Lou's ability to juggle her family and successful practice at a time when there were few women working outside of the home inspired a young mother that sat next to her at a political dinner in 1962 to enroll in law school herself. That young mother was none other than Rosalie Wahl, who later became Chief Justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court.

Klas was appointed to the Second Judicial District in 1986 by Governor Rudy Perpich. She was the first woman appointed to this position. As her husband Dan would later put it, "the governor broke up our private practice of over a dozen years by appointing Mary Lou a Ramsey County district court judge." On the bench, Klas is most known for her fierce advocacy on behalf of victims of domestic violence. Once sworn into her new position, Klas made it clear that she would be a different kind of judge, criticizing police, prosecutors and the courts for not being tough enough on domestic violence. She kept every word of that promise, which often pitted her against police chiefs, prosecutors, and her fellow judges along the way. At one time she was the issuing judge for more than 90% of the orders for protection in Ramsey County. Judge Klas took all the cases that came before her very seriously, and as a result professed that worries filled her mind [and] nightmares filled her nights.

Klas retired from the bench in 2000, but not from passionate advocacy for domestic violence victims and continued service to the community. Klas proudly served as one of the founding members of Minnesota Women Lawyers which was launched in 1972 and was the recipient of the Myra Bradwell award in 1986. She taught as an adjunct professor in family law from 1991 to 1996 at William Mitchell College of Law and was the recipient of Mitchell's Honorable Warren Burger Distinguished Alumni Award in 1995. She served on the Board of Trustees at the College of St. Catherine and is the recipient of a number of alumnae awards from St. Catherine's. Klas has also been active in the Guild Incorporated, ISALAH Domestic Violence Task Force and Advocates for Human Rights, to name just a few.

**BK: In 1956, you were one of only three women enrolled in your law school class of 100 students at William Mitchell Col-**

**Law (then the St. Paul College of Law). What was it like to be a woman in law school at that time?**

MK: At that time, the law school was a night school and was located in a three-story mansion on Sixth Street in St. Paul. My classmates and I worked full-time during the day and went to school at night. And I remember there was only one bathroom for the few women students — and that was all the way up on the third floor of the building where classes were held - not easy to get to. There were two male law professors for our freshman class of 100 students. One day during a break between classes, I was in the stacks in the library and I ran into one of the professors. He was trying to charm me and asked how I liked the classes and other generalities. And I asked, "Why don't you ever call on the women in our class?" This professor got very flustered and responded, "I know you [and your female classmates] know the answers, and therefore I assume we don't have to call on you."

**How did that make you feel?**

It was crazy! I was frustrated by the inadequacy of his response. I knew his response meant that he and the other male professor didn't have to deal with [the women] at all if they just wrote us off. Clearly, he was trying to put me off with flattery, and I would have none of it!

**You graduated second in your law school class of 1960. Describe your job prospects, the adversity you faced as a woman lawyer then judge, and how you have overcome any obstacles.**

I was naive when I graduated. I took the bar exam in the heat of August in 1960 in a building with no air conditioning, pregnant with my second child. I was a young woman lawyer married to a male lawyer and the mother of two children. I did not have any relatives or friends in law firms. I was eager to do anything that it took. I thought they would be glad to hire me. But it's very simple - there were no jobs for women lawyers. So, I became active in the Minnesota State Bar Association and began chairing committees, working for non-profit organizations, state commissions and doing work for the underprivileged. I wasn't on the golf course. I was doing the grunt work.

And I became active in politics. While in law school, I was hired as the Executive Assistant to Minnesota Governor Orville Freeman. I continued that job after graduation. It was a good job, and I enjoyed it. In 1972, Dan and I decided to start our joint practice where I focused on family law. I served on the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, and our local and national bar association network helped to support our practice with referrals.

When I was appointed to the bench in Ramsey County in 1986, I was



Judge Mary Louise Klas attending a Women in Law Tea at William Mitchell College of Law

the first and only woman, but I was grateful to be there. All of the male judges had been there a long time. They treated me like I was a little girl. I didn't let that bother me. I found ways to be useful, including starting a program to train and educate newly appointed judges to the bench. I also learned quickly that the judges required more training on issues of domestic violence for a "change of heart" to ensure justice for victims. I worked hard on this. It was slow but steady work, and I am grateful for the opportunity.

#### Why did you form MWL? Why was the time right 50 years ago?

In the early 1970's, Esther [Justice Esther Tomljanovich] was serving as the Revisor of Statutes for the State of Minnesota. Esther and I, along with the few other women who had graduated from law school in the 50's and 60's, were fed up. We wanted to form an organization to support women lawyers, and it was time.

It took a village. It still does.

#### To what do you attribute your optimism and success as a lawyer and judge?

Over the years, I have been asked why I am so "Type A" and driven. I am the oldest of two girls and was raised in a modest, middle class family. My mother had a miscarriage between me and my younger sister, and that child would have been a boy. I guess that because there were no male children, neither my mother or father—or anyone—ever said to me, "that's men's work or that's women's work.... No, you can't do that, Mary Lou." And the schools I went to — St. Joseph's Academy, which was an all-girls' Catholic high school and then the College of St. Catherine, an women's Catholic college — provided wonderful role models.

I was told I could do things and that there are no limitations. That shaped me and has enabled me to persevere despite the obstacles.

#### What is your advice for young women lawyers?

● **LISTEN** so you can determine the real needs and who most needs your help. Ask yourself—who in my community is hurting and what can I do to help? You can persuade others to make a difference. The important

work is NOT the most popular or the most glamorous.

#### ● Pick yourself up, shake off the dust and find a way AROUND the barricades.

As we continue the important work of Minnesota Women Lawyers, I encourage each of you to ask yourself, "What can I do?" Consider getting involved and offering your legal expertise and support on a local level with community-based agencies which support the underserved in our community to ensure a voice and equitable access to justice for everyone. As a lawyer, you can provide dedicated, considered thinking around global needs. Step up and do the grunt work.

My wish is that each of you, along with the mission and leadership of MWL, will be the support for legislative passion around eliminating domestic violence here and everywhere. ■

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**ABOUT JUDGE MARY LOUISE KLAS:** Judge Mary Louise Klas was the first woman appointed to the Ramsey County District Court in 1986. She is also one of MWL's Founding Mothers.



**ABOUT BARBARA KLAS:** Barbara is the middle child of five children of Mary Lou and Daniel Klas, Barbara is a lawyer and consultant for Casepoint LLC, a global SaaS legal technology company that enables lawyers and their teams to leverage the best technology for success.



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# Making a Difference: An Interview with Judge Jacqueline Regis

By Debra Pexa



Judge M. Jacqueline Regis

I have a clear memory of meeting Judge Jacquie Regis for the first time. It was September 1999 and I had just flown in from Anchorage to have my second interview for the Minnesota Women Lawyers (MWL) Executive Director position. Although I grew up in Minnesota, I had been living and working in Alaska for nearly 10 years, and I was excited with the opportunity to learn more about MWL, its mission and the attorneys who led the organization. At the interview, seated around the conference table was a veritable “who’s who” of MWL leadership at the time: then-MWL President Jacqueline Mrachek, Board members Lisa Brabbit, Tami Schroeder, Julie Ritz-Schlaifer, Judge Miriam Ryken, Judge Lenor Scheffler, Tracy Van Steenburgh, and Judge Jacquie Regis. With a generous smile, Judge

Regis introduced herself as MWL’s President-Elect. “So we might have the opportunity to work very closely with one another in the next few years,” she said.

The rest is history... I started the Executive Director position in October 1999, and Judge Regis was the first MWL leader under which I served for her entire presidency. Not only did we work together during her year as President beginning in July 2000, but we began our planning efforts soon after I was hired. And with good reason. Fiscal Year 2000-2001 was a very full year, with so many of the events and initiatives having a long-lasting impact on MWL.

Developed under her presidential leadership, Judge Regis led the formation of both the MWL Advisory Board and the Service to MWL Award. Since its inception, the MWL Advisory Board has been made up of experienced women lawyers who reflect the diversity of MWL’s membership. Through candid and astute conversations, the MWL Advisory Board serves as an idea-generator and a sounding board to MWL, providing invaluable guidance as the organization works towards its mission and goals. Furthermore, in establishing the Service to MWL Award, Judge Regis understood the importance of recognizing the incredible work of so many dedicated MWL leaders. Not only does the annual award draw attention to each year’s recipient, but it also celebrates all of MWL’s volunteers whose commitment advances the organization towards its mission.

Additionally, many will fondly remember MWL’s 28th Annual Meeting presided-over by Judge Regis. As one of the largest events in MWL’s history, United States Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor joined MWL for a day of events, and then delivered keynote remarks at the evening’s Annual Meeting. There was also another program that year, equally as impactful. Through Judge Regis’s leadership, MWL hosted an event featuring Karen Clanton, author of “Dear Sisters, Dear Daughters: Words of Wisdom from Multicultural Women Who’ve Been There and Done That.” With that seminal conversation twenty-three years ago, Ms. Clanton along with attorneys from the Minnesota legal community, helped lay the groundwork for MWL’s continuing equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts.

With each of these events and initiatives, Judge Regis’s innovation and leadership were key to MWL’s success.

Fast forward to this year: MWL’s 50th Anniversary. When plans were made to dedicate this issue of *With Equal Right* to MWL’s history, by hearing from some of its founding mothers and past-presidents, I jumped at the chance to meet with Judge Regis. Not only to delve a little deeper into her year as President, but to also learn more about her background, her professional experience, and why MWL has been her “chosen” organization throughout her career.

My conversation with Judge Regis did not disappoint.

**DP: In 2013, you published a memoir “The Daughter of L’Arsenal,” highlighting your experience growing up in Haiti and then immigrating to the United States. Your story is a powerful narrative of resilience and working for equity and opportunity, in the face of some pretty difficult circumstances. Can you share a little of your personal story and background? Who were the people who had the greatest impact on you?**

JR: I was born in Haiti and my mother’s family was prominent in their coastal community of Les Cayes. There were 10 children in my mother’s family, made up of priests and nuns, teachers and lawyers. In fact, I had an uncle who was a Supreme Court Justice in Port au Prince and another uncle who owned the only law school in our town. They were all good, hard-working people. But they were very prejudiced against women. It was just part of the culture I grew up in. There simply weren’t the same opportunities for women, compared to the men.

Throughout my life, my mother was always there for me. I’ve called her my Guiding Lantern. Education was so important to her. Because of the status of her family, I was able to go to school, when kids next door to me couldn’t go because they didn’t have the resources. My mother, rebel of rebels, absolutely knew that she had to put significant effort into my education in order for me to thrive in a culture that didn’t have a path for girls beyond mother or maybe teacher. It was often hard. In fact, I thought my mother liked my brothers more than me. But in reality, she just raised the standards for me to ensure I would succeed.

When I was 9 or 10 years old, I also recall a woman coming to our school to talk about her job. Traditionally, women had their place, only supporting their families or otherwise for a few as teachers. But this woman told me something different. She was a lawyer and her focus was to improve the plight of people through the law. I identified with that instantly. I knew I could use the law to make a difference in the world. Of course, at that age, I didn’t know how I’d would make it happen. However somehow, I knew I would.

When it was time for high school, my mother decided to send me to Port au Prince to a prestigious new school. It was risky, but she knew sending me there would set me on the path for success. And it did. A few years later, my oldest brother went to stay with my Aunt in Miami, and then he moved to New York. When he did, he sent for my mother, and then for me. I arrived in New York in October 1970. Soon after, I became a mother’s helper with a kind and generous family in Greenwich, Connecticut, and I also started school again. It turned out that Connecticut was



MWL’s 27th Annual Meeting, July 2001. Left to right: Judge Jacquie Regis and Justice Sandra Day O’Connor

the beginning of a whole new life for me. I was with that family for a year and a half, and then I was able to attend college. That experience turned out to be the foundation of everything that came next in my life.

**After college, you went to law school, and eventually moved to Minnesota. How did that transpire? And how did you first get involved with MWL?**

Once I graduated from college, I decided to attend law school at night at Suffolk University in Boston. After I graduated, I was hired as a law clerk for the Massachusetts Superior Court, a trial court equivalent to our district courts in Minnesota. Following that clerkship, I served as a prosecutor in Suffolk County for a short time. Later I worked for the Massachusetts Labor Relations Commission. Then my husband, who I met while in law school, was hired for a job in Minnesota. So, we moved here.

In Minnesota, my first position was as an assistant attorney general at the Attorney General's Office. While at the AG's Office, I met Sara Jones (FY95-96 MWL President). Sara invited me to join MWL, and I did. MWL was the first bar association I joined, and immediately, I felt like I was in good company. I appreciated MWL's mission and the organization's effort to address injustice for women attorneys. I think I felt connected to the mission because of how I grew up as a child, with women and girls being treated so unfairly and deprived of opportunities based solely on gender. And, I also found some pretty amazing mentors at MWL, who have supported me throughout my career.

After I had been involved with MWL for a while, Judge Susan Richard Nelson (FY96-97 MWL President) suggested that I submit my nomination for the Board of Directors. Soon enough, I was elected as MWL Treasurer, and then later asked to consider the President position. I said yes again and in spring 1999, I was elected to the MWL President-Elect position, becoming MWL President in July 2000.

**Your term as President included some pretty significant events and initiatives. What do you remember most from that time?**

I remember thinking that one year as the organization's leader is not a lot of time. Although I'm not a big planning person, I had a pretty good idea of what I wanted to accomplish. At that time, MWL's focus was on securing more members. Increasing the organization's voice, influence, and effectiveness by getting more people involved and engaged with MWL's mission. In coordinating my year, I relied on leadership across MWL for their input and support. Judge Susan Nelson, Judge Wilhelmina Wright and Judge Cara Lee Neville all provided insight that helped to guide my planning, particularly as I was considering a big-name speaker for our Annual Meeting. I wanted to use that event to provide MWL with greater influence and visibility. So, I kept my eyes open and used my connections. But I think there was a little bit of luck involved too...

Prior to my role as MWL President, and thanks to the encouragement and mentoring of Judge Neville, I was elected to serve as an ABA delegate for Minnesota. While I was still MWL President-Elect, I attended an ABA House of Delegates meeting in Chicago. There, I met Dean Robert Stein who was the ABA's Executive Director at the time, and I learned that he had good connections to some of the United States Supreme Court Justices, including Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. Later, I also learned that one my colleagues at the St. Paul-Travelers Companies' Legal Services Department was, by marriage, a close family member of Dean Stein. So one day, I dropped by my colleague's office and asked if he thought Dean Stein might offer support to an invitation to Justice O'Connor to speak at MWL's Annual Meeting. Without missing a beat, my colleague said: "let's find out." He picked up the phone and called Dean Stein, who remembered me from the ABA Delegation and enthusiastically supported the idea. He graciously provided guidance on how I might extend an invitation to Justice O'Connor, along with his support. I followed through immediately and just a few weeks later, I received a letter from Justice O'Connor's office at the United States Supreme Court, accepting our invitation to speak.

**It's quite a project to coordinate an event around a U.S. Supreme Court Justice. That's when the work really began, didn't it?**

It certainly did. In looking back, the level of focus and unity and pride that MWL had to make that event the wonderful success that it was -- well, it was beyond anything I'd ever done before or after. I was, and still am, so proud. The efforts of the organization were tremendous, and I think that is what always touched me the most. A large group of MWL volunteers stepping forward to coordinate all the details, with Judge Susan Nelson generously leading the effort. The resulting event was truly



*MWL's "Dear Sisters, Dear Daughters" event, Spring 2011. Left to right: Lenor Scheffler, Le Fleur Browne, Judge Tanya Bransford, Karen Clanton and Judge Jacquie Regis*

a credit to their selfless leadership. And I must emphasize that MWL was very fortunate to have you as our Executive Director when we undertook the coordination of such a large event. Frankly, your leadership was key.

Of course, equally stunning were the remarks delivered by Justice O'Connor, when she spoke out for the first time in public against the death penalty, in front of our audience. And then the next day and into the week that followed, dozens and dozens of local, national, and international news organizations carried the story. For some reason, Justice O'Connor chose our forum to make her statements. All in all, the event certainly met my goal of giving MWL more visibility.

**During your year as President, you also created the MWL Advisory Board, which has been a pillar of MWL leadership ever since. Can you tell me a little more about its development?**

I'm so proud of that as well. But again, it was a collective effort. I remember speaking to Judge Susan Nelson about MWL often losing touch with its Presidents once their term had ended. I also wanted to have more opportunities for senior leadership to get involved with MWL. Judge Nelson suggested creating an Advisory Board for those members and leaders. After further brainstorming the idea with Judge Neville and Cathy Haukedahl, we did just that. Now, 22 years later, the Advisory Board has continued to provide our past-presidents and senior leaders a real stake in the organization. And MWL has truly benefitted from their continuing leadership.

**Woven throughout your MWL leadership efforts was attention to equity, diversity, and inclusion. You invited author Karen Clanton to speak about her book "Dear Sisters, Dear Daughters: Words of Wisdom from Multicultural Women Who've Been There and Done That." You were mindful about your leadership appointments, to ensure they were representative of MWL's membership. And you served as the first MWL President who was Black. What impact did your efforts related to ED&I have then, and continue to have now?**

Representation is so important. We see that right now with the appointment of Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson to the United States Supreme Court. Although her role on the court is yet to play out, Justice Brown Jackson simply serving in the position is tremendously significant. That is representation at the highest levels of the profession, but it plays out at all levels too.

Throughout my involvement with MWL, I have always been so pleased by its sense of inclusion. I particularly felt that while I was President. MWL isn't afraid to have the important conversations. We did just that at the Dear Sisters, Dear Daughters event during my presidency, speaking with Karen Clanton, along with local leaders, Judge Tanya Bransford, Le Fleur Browne and Lenor Scheffler. And these conversations at MWL have clearly continued. The organization is working hard in this sphere. I see MWL's recent leaders as women who are so astute, intuitive, and passionate about these issues. They are making an impact. I believe MWL is

well-respected, and its inclusivity is very visible.

**As MWL celebrates its 50th Anniversary, we continue to look forward, what do you see for MWL, and for the profession itself?**

My youngest child is a new attorney and a representative on MWL's Partner Leadership Council. My advice to her, as she was starting out after law school, was "whatever you do, MWL first." In my opinion, this organization provides an opportunity to young women attorneys that no other organization does in the same way. From the time I first joined, MWL saw me. I was willing, and the organization was open to every idea I proposed.

I also know that my MWL involvement and leadership had a big impact on the career I've had, including my position on the bench. Women attorneys should know that the skills and opportunities offered by MWL can have a tangible and significant impact on professional success. MWL is an open and welcoming organization. For me, I really believe that joining MWL so many years ago was an inspired idea. Looking to the future, MWL has the opportunity to continue to engage locally with the law schools, with new students, with judges, and so many others in the legal community. In this divided country as it is right now, there are opportunities for MWL to continue to consider what really matters to women attorneys. Because MWL is a place to get involved and make a difference. ■

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**ABOUT JUDGE JACQUELINE REGIS:** Judge Jacqueline Regis, a former Minnesota Women Lawyers' President (2000-2001) is currently a Judge in the Fourth Judicial District. Prior to her judicial appointment in 2011 by Governor Mark Dayton, she worked at UnitedHealth Group, the St. Paul Travelers' Insurance Companies and the Minnesota Attorney General's Office.



**ABOUT DEBRA PEXA:** Debra Pexa is the Executive Director for Minnesota Women Lawyers.



**MWL FOUNDATION  
LAW STUDENT  
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OPPORTUNITIES**

Please visit [www.mwlawyers.org](http://www.mwlawyers.org)  
for complete information.

# PROUDLY SUPPORTING

## Minnesota Women Lawyers

Thank you for supporting the changing needs of women in the profession and helping develop our women attorneys as firm leaders.

**CHEERS TO 50 YEARS!**





# Celebrating Success

Minnesota Women Lawyers is pleased to help celebrate your success! Are you an MWL member with professional news to share? Email Katie Gunaratne (kgunaratne@mwlawyers.org) for inclusion in the next issue of With Equal Right.



In May, **Dionne Blake** was promoted to Vice President, Law at Target. Dionne joined Target in 2009 as Labor Counsel. During her tenure, she has provided legal advice and support in a variety of roles for clients and teams across all areas of the organization. Her most recent role was Assistant General Counsel, Employee and Labor Relations. As Vice President, Law, she reports to the General Counsel and leads the Employment and Labor relations function. Her teams provide support for all issues related to employment law and litigation, labor relations, and Target investigations.



**Justice Ann McKeig** was honored to receive the Gwen M. Lerner Award and the Wallace Lerner Award for Excellence from Mitchell Hamline Law Review this May. This award is an acknowledgement of her incredible impact as an attorney working in Child Protection and Welfare, as a judge in criminal and family court, and now as an associate justice on the Minnesota Supreme Court.



Moss & Barnettis pleased to announce that **Lindsay L. Case**, have become shareholders in the firm effective January 1, 2022. Lindsay L. Case focuses her practice on closing and delivering loans secured by multifamily projects to secondary market investors like Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae. As part of this practice, she prepares and negotiates loan documents, reviews legal opinions, examines title, survey, and other due diligence. Lindsay's practice ranges from closing \$1,000,000 supplemental loans to \$100,000,000+ acquisition loans. She has experience with unique deal components such as affordable housing restrictions, condominiums, HOAs, mixed-use developments, and lease-up and value-add properties. Lindsay structures

transactions to meet the needs of sophisticated borrower structures involving joint ventures, tenancies-in-common, 1031 exchanges, and foreign guarantors while offering explanation and guidance to transaction participants.



Governor Tim Walz and along with Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan selected **Maria Mitchell** for appointment as District Court Judge in Minnesota's Second Judicial District. Ms. Mitchell will be chambered in St. Paul in Ramsey County. Governor Tim Walz appointed Maria Mitchell on June 13, 2022.



Moss & Barnett is pleased to announce that attorney **Leah E. DeGrazia** has joined the firm. Leah is a member of the firm's Real Estate team, representing clients in a broad range of general real estate and commercial real estate finance transactions. She prepares loan and real estate sale documents, negotiates title insurance coverage, identifies and resolves title and survey issues, and assists with loan modification, partial releases, and easement issues.

Prior to joining Moss & Barnett, Leah focused her practice on residential landlord-tenant law and housing policy. Her background also includes work in the mental health field, public health, and early childhood education. Leah received her J.D. from the University of Minnesota Law School and her B.A., with distinction, from the University of Iowa.



**Tara L. Smith** launched Smith Family Law PLLC in Edina, where she continues her practice by simplifying an otherwise complicated and oftentimes overwhelming process for clients facing conflict(less) settlement or contested litigation in divorce, child custody, parenting time, paternity, child support, spousal maintenance, and relocation matters.



**Lariss Maldonado**, Lead Counsel at Wells Fargo in Regulatory and Risk, has been appointed to serve as Chair of the ACLU of Minnesota. She is the first woman of color to serve as Chair in the organization's 70 year history, and brings a deep commitment to serving disenfranchised and marginalized communities. In her role as Chair, Lariss is particularly focused on helping the organization realize the long-term sustainable growth necessary to meet the civil liberties challenges facing our country today.



After 9 years as a Rising Star, **Margaux (Coady) Soeffker** has been recognized as a Super Lawyer for 2022. Top lawyers in the State of Minnesota are selected as "Super Lawyers"® based on peer recognition and professional achievement. Margaux runs a boutique family law firm in the West Metro, Margaux C. Soeffker, LLC.

MINNESOTA WOMEN LAWYERS PRESENTS

# 50<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL MEETING CELEBRATION



Minnesota Women Lawyers was pleased to commemorate its 50th Annual Meeting Celebration on Tuesday, June 7th, 2022 at the Nicollet Island Pavilion, just outside downtown Minneapolis. The evening's main program was also made available via an online live-stream.

On this warm summer evening, MWL leaders, members and the legal community gathered along the banks of the Mississippi river to reconnect with one another and to honor MWL's past 50 years and those who made it possible. MWL also celebrated today's success, introducing its FY22-23 Board of Directors and recognizing the 2022 Annual Award recipients. Finally, guests looked ahead with collective purpose and conviction, hearing inspirational video remarks from Mary L. Smith, current nominee for President-Elect of the American Bar Association, and from keynote speaker, LaTanya Langley, Chief Legal Officer and Corporate Secretary of Edgewell Personal Care Company.

MWL extends a sincere thanks to the many MWL leaders, members, volunteers, and event sponsors, who helped to make this milestone event a tremendous success.



*FY21-22 MWL President Kristin Haugen facilitates the 50th Annual Meeting Celebration program*



*U.S. District Court Judges offer congratulations to MWL via video remarks. Left to right: Judge Wilhelmina Wright, Judge Ann Montgomery, Judge Nancy Brasel and Judge Susan Nelson*



*Keynote Speaker LaTanya Langley offers inspiring remarks to MWL members and legal community guests*



*Left to right: FY19-20 MWL President Amy Taber, MWL Executive Director Debra Pexa, Keynote Speaker LaTanya Langley, FY21-22 MWL President Kristin Haugen, MWL Board Member Dionne Blake and FY22-23 MWL President Jennifer Robbins*



# Thanks to our 50th Annual Meeting Celebration Sponsors!

## LEAD Sponsor



## Benefactor Sponsors



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Julie Ritz-Schlaifer  
Judge Miriam Rykken

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# Thanks to MWL Premier Members 2021-2022

Minnesota Women Lawyers extends sincere thanks to its 2018-2019 Premier Members. A strong Premier Member commitment has been vital to MWL's success over this past year.

### Diamond

Ronda Bayer  
Felicia Boyd  
Teresa Fariss McClain  
Susan Gallagher  
Hon. Arlene Perkkio  
Susan Rhode  
Jenny Robbins  
Breia Schleuss  
Amy Taber  
Hon. Mary Vasaly  
Chelsea Walcker

### Sapphire

Landon Ascheman  
Patricia Beithon  
Lisa Brabbit  
Liz Burnett  
Dixie Carroll  
Hon. Margaret Chutich  
Elizabeth Fors  
Kathleen Lamb  
Judith Langevin  
Katie Lichty  
Kimberly Lowe  
Bridget Nason  
Pamela Rochlin  
Hon. Miriam Rykken  
Molly Tyroler

Visit our website to view a complete list of MWL's Premier Members.

**Help Us Reach Our 10% Goal: Join MWL as a 2022-2023 Premier Member**

Premier Membership allows you to streamline your annual support and enjoy exclusive benefits all year long! Our Premier Members also help make MWL more accessible to all members through their increased support.

This year, our goal is for 10% of MWL's membership to join or renew as a Premier Member. Learn more at [www.mwlawyers.org](http://www.mwlawyers.org).

MWL offers its sincere thanks to those who have already renewed or joined as a Premier Member for FY22-23.

A full list of benefits are available at [www.mwlawyers.org/premiermembership](http://www.mwlawyers.org/premiermembership)

# 2022 MWL Annual Awards

Minnesota Women Lawyers was honored to present the 2022 MWL Annual Awards at its 50th Annual Meeting Celebration on June 7th.

**MWL presented its Community Impact Award to Joan Bibelhausen, Executive Director of Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers; and to the Minnesota Association of Black Lawyers.** In commemoration of its 50th Anniversary, this newly established award recognizes those across Minnesota who have made a substantial and positive impact on their communities by inspiring hope; embodying leadership, inclusiveness, and civility; and striving for a just society.

**MWL presented its Leadership Award to Maslon LLP.** This award recognizes legal employers throughout the state that strive to enhance the status, influence and effectiveness of women lawyers in their employ.

**MWL presented its Service to MWL Award to Emerald Gratz and Theresa Johnson, MWL Leadership Institute Co-Chairs.** This award is designed to recognize the MWL member, group of members, 100% club member, or other individual(s) whose efforts, during the past program year or over a period of time, have contributed substantially to advance MWL's mission.

**MWL presented its Equal Justice Award to Eura Chang, University of Minnesota Law School 3L law student,** in recognition of her paper entitled "Barring Entry to the Legal Profession: How the Law Condone Willful Blindness to the Bar Exam's Racially Disparate Impacts." **This year, an Honorable Mention Award was also presented to Monica Shaffer, Mitchell Hamline School of Law 2L law student,** in recognition of her paper entitled "Constitutionality of Reparations for Native Americans: Confronting the Boarding Schools." All Minnesota law students were invited to submit papers or articles they have written on a topic involving law and social justice.

**MWL presented its Myra Bradwell Award to Judge Cara Lee Neville, President at Benchmark National ADR, LLC and an MWL Founding Member.** This award is presented to an MWL member who expresses the highest ideals of the legal profession and who possesses the qualities exemplified by Myra Bradwell such as courage, perseverance and leadership on issues of concern to women.

Congratulations to all 2022 Annual Award recipients.



*MWL Community Impact Award recipient Joan Bibelhausen*



*Left to right: Amanda Matchett, Dana Mitchell and Abou Amara, Jr., Minnesota Association of Black Lawyers Board members, accepting the MWL Community Impact Award on behalf of MABL*



*Left to right: Service to MWL recipients Emerald Gratz and Theresa Johnson*



*Left to right: Leora Maccabee and Laura Trahms-Hagen, accepting the MWL Leadership Award on behalf of Maslon LLP*



*Left to right: Professor Carol Chomsky, MWL Equal Justice Award Recipient Eura Chang, MWL Equal Justice Award Honorable Mention Monica Shaffer and FY21-22 MWL President Kristin Haugen*



*MWL Myra Bradwell Award recipient Judge Cara Lee Neville*

For more photos from the 50th Annual Meeting Celebration,  
and to learn how MWL commemorated the entire year, visit [www.mwlattorneys.org](http://www.mwlattorneys.org).

# MWL Thanks Its Many Leaders, Past & Present

## MWL'S FOUNDING MOTHERS

Judge Patricia Belois  
 Mary Jeanne Coyne  
 Michelle Egan  
 Doris Ohlsen Huspeni  
 Ethel Kommes  
 Eleanor Kostermann  
 Donna Johnson  
 Judge Harriet Lansing  
 Jean McVeety  
 Judge Cara Lee Neville  
 Judy Oakes  
 Nancy Olkon  
 Frances Peterson  
 Frieda Pinger  
 Camilla Reiersgord  
 Irene Scott  
 Violet Sollie  
 Justice Esther Tomljanovich  
 Justice Rosalie Wahl

*\*The women listed above were in attendance at the first MWL meeting on September 21st, 1972.*

## MWL'S PAST PRESIDENTS

1972	Irene Scott*	1997-98	Hon. Susan Rester Miles
1972-73	Hon. Patricia Belois**	1998-99	Julie Ritz-Schlaifer
1974-75	Judy Oakes	1999-00	Jacqueline Mrachek
1975-76	Judy Oakes	2000-01	Hon. M. Jaqueline Regis
1976-77	Phyllis Jones	2001-02	Lisa Montpetit Brabbit
1977-78	Helen Kelly	2002-03	Sara Schwebs
1978-79	Margaret Mahoney	2003-04	Trudy Halla
1979-80	Phyllis Karasov	2004-05	Jean F. Holloway
1980-81	Jean Heilman	2005-06	Dani P. Deering
1981-82	Sheryl Ramstad Hvass	2006-07	Hon. Mary Vasaly
1982-83	Carol Grant	2007-08	Kari Jensen Thomas
1983-84	Marsha Freeman	2008-09	Luz Maria Frias
1984-85	Joyce Connelly	2009-10	Megan Hertzler
1985-86	Suzanne Born	2010-11	Hon. Elizabeth Cutter
1986-87	Ann Huntrods	2011-12	Carrie Daniel Russell
1987-88	Barbara Leininger	2012-13	Dana Bartocci
1988-89	Cynthia Whiteford	2013-14	Teresa Fariss McClain
1989-90	Hon. Beryl Nord	2014-15	Pamela Rochlin
1990-91	Kim Beuchel Mesun	2015-16	Bridget Nason
1991-92	Marlene S. Garvis	2016-17	Connie Armstrong
1992-93	Leslie M. Altman	2017-18	Kendra Brodin
1993-94	Carol L. Chomsky	2018-19	Shannon Harmon
1994-95	Carrine H. Thomson	2019-20	Amy Taber
1995-96	Sara H. Jones	2020-21	Breia Schleuss
1996-97	Hon. Susan R. Nelson	2021-22	Kristin Haugen

\*First named President  
 \*\*First elected President

**MWL MINNESOTA WOMEN LAWYERS**

### FY22-23 Board of Directors

Learn more about all MWL Leaders at [www.mwlawyers.org](http://www.mwlawyers.org).

# June 7, 2022 Declared "Minnesota Women Lawyers Day"

By proclamation, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz declared June 7, 2022 as "Minnesota Women Lawyers Day" in commemoration of MWL's 50th Anniversary. Current and former MWL leaders were honored to attend a reading of the proclamation by Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan. The proclamation, in part, read "Minnesota Women Lawyers celebrates its 50th anniversary by paying tribute to the dedication and leadership of the many women who have improved and continue to improve our State through their significant contributions and work as women attorneys."



Current and past MWL leaders attend the ceremony recognizing Minnesota Women Lawyers Day

## Thank You to MWL's 2022 Partners

### Platinum

DLA Piper LLP  
Dorsey & Whitney LLP  
Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP  
Gustafson Gluek PLLC  
MADEL PA  
Robins Kaplan LLP

### Gold

Barnes & Thornburg LLP  
Fredrikson & Byron, P.A.  
Greenberg Traurig LLP  
Jones Day  
Prime Therapeutics  
Zelle LLP

### Silver

Ballard Spahr LLP  
Fish & Richardson PC  
Larkin Hoffman  
Lathrop GPM  
Merchant & Gould P.C.  
Moss & Barnett  
Nilan Johnson Lewis PA  
Saul Ewing Arnstein & Lehr  
Sinson LLP  
Stoel Rives LLP  
Taft Law  
UnitedHealth Group

### Bronze

Arthur Chapman Kettering Smetak & Pikala, P.A.  
Bassford Remele  
Best & Flanagan LLP  
Bowman and Brooke LLP  
Forsgren Fisher McCalmont DeMarea Tysver LLP  
Fox Rothschild LLP  
Greene Espel PLLP  
Halunen Law  
LeVander, Gillen & Miller, P.A.  
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Maslon LLP  
Meagher & Geer, P.L.L.P.  
MJSB Employment Justice  
Norton Rose Fulbright US LLP  
Ogletree, Deakins  
Paradigm / Veritext  
Quinlivan & Hughes, P.A.  
U.S. Bank National Association  
Winthrop & Weinstine, P.A.



**SAVE THE DATE!**

MWL'S 28TH ANNUAL  
ROSALIE WAHL LEADERSHIP LECTURE  
Monday, October 24th, 2022



**MWL is honored  
to welcome  
keynote speaker  
Judge Pamela Alexander,  
retired Hennepin County  
District Court Judge**

Information coming soon on [www.mwlawyers.org](http://www.mwlawyers.org).

# Support MWL's Mission by Renewing Your MWL Membership Today!

All MWL memberships expired on June 30, 2022. If you haven't already renewed for FY22-23, we invite you to do so today.

MWL brings together nearly 1,300 lawyers, judges, law students, legal employers and supporters who are dedicated to advancing the success of women in the legal profession and striving for a just society. MWL believes that bringing diverse individuals together allows us to collectively and more effectively develop ideas, respond to the needs of our membership, and address issues within our legal community. MWL welcomes all levels of involvement, and is dedicated to addressing the changing needs of women in the legal profession through initiatives that are guided by our mission and values.

All members up for renewal have been sent an email notice and mailing with instructions on how to renew. Please contact MWL Membership and Communications Coordinator Katie Gunaratne ([kgunaratne@mwlawyers.org](mailto:kgunaratne@mwlawyers.org)) with any questions.

Visit [www.mwlawyers.org/memberbenefits](http://www.mwlawyers.org/memberbenefits) to find out more.



## Make the Most of Your MWL Membership: Get Involved!

### 2022-2023 MWL Chapters

**The Central Chapter** includes MWL members working or living in the counties of Benton, Douglas, Kandiyohi, Meeke, Mille Lacs, Morrison, Pope, Sherburne, Stearns, Todd. Upcoming activities will be announced shortly.

President: Kimberly Stommes, St. Cloud Public Defender's Office  
Secretary: Heidi Hovis, Minnesota Department of Human Rights  
Co-Secretary: Brenda Sletten-Abedi, Board of Public Defense  
Treasurer: Ashley Bukowski, Kelm & Reuter, P.A.  
MWL Board Liaison: Michelle Draewell,  
Quinlivan & Hughes, P.A.

**The St. Croix Valley Chapter** includes MWL members working or living in Washington and Chisago Counties. The Chapter meets to discuss current legal issues, network, and socialize and hosts volunteer opportunities in the community. Upcoming activities will be announced shortly.

President: Angela Heart, Heart Law, LLC  
Vice President: Vicki Hruby, Jardine, Logan & O'Brien  
Treasurer: Mackenzie Campbell, Doar Drill & Skow  
MWL Board Liaison: Amy Schmidt,  
Ramsey County Attorney's Office  
Secondary MWL Board Liaison: Lesa Koski,  
Attorney at Law

**The South Central Chapter** includes MWL members working or living in the counties of Blue Earth, Brown, Faribault, Le Sueur, Martin, Nicollet, Steele, Waseca and Watonwan. Upcoming activities will be announced shortly.

Chair: Jennifer Gish, Gislason & Hunter LLP  
Co-Chair: Susan Chambers, Attorney at Law, Mediator

**The Northeastern Chapter** includes MWL members working or living in the counties of Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Lake, Pine and St. Louis. Upcoming activities will be announced shortly.

Chair: Courtney Beck, Hanft Fride  
Vice President: Heather Mutchler, Hanft Fride  
Secretary: Amanda Mangan, Johnson, Killen & Seiler  
Treasurer: Kay Biga, Spott Law Office  
MWL Board Liaison: Deanna Reder,  
Mitchell Hamline School of Law (2L)  
and American Indian Community Housing Organization

# Make the Most of Your MWL Membership: Get Involved!

## 2022-2023 MWL Affinity Groups

### Alternative Legal Careers

The Alternative Legal Career Affinity Group's goals are to 1) promote the many career options available to attorneys who choose not to practice but are still law school graduates; 2) provide professional development opportunities to the broad range of skills and experiences of the many alternative career attorneys in MWL; 3) create an opportunity to exchange ideas, perspectives, and career options with each other; and 4) validate alternative careers as viable, intentional, and important ways in which an attorney can use a law degree. Gatherings will be held on at least a quarterly basis, alternating between happy hour gatherings, informal gatherings, and programming.

Co-Chairs:  
Ruth Isaacson, Maslon LLP  
Marie Ruzek, Wells Fargo

### Book Club

The MWL Book Club offers a casual and fun opportunity to meet other MWL members and discuss a book of common interest. Gatherings are held on the second Tuesday of every month from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at Nico's Taco Bar in St. Paul. The group enjoys dinner together (pay on your own) and then spends an hour discussing the book selection for the month.

Co-Chairs:  
Karen Bohaty, Attorney at Law  
Amy Krupinski,  
Collins, Buckley, Suntry & Hough PLLP

### Corporate Counsel

Geared towards attorneys in an in-house or corporate counsel setting, the goal of the MWL Corporate Counsel Affinity Group is to provide an opportunity for its members to meet, support and network with one another, as well as to discuss issues of common interest. Gatherings will be held at least quarterly, and will feature focused discussions led by a speaker, and more casual opportunities to connect with one another.

Chair:  
Karen Opp, Korn Ferry

### Knitting

The MWL Knitting Affinity Group seeks to foster the creative talents of MWL members by providing a venue for members to gather and engage in knitting or other creative endeavors. All creative interests are welcome.

Chair:  
Shannon Harmon,  
Hennepin County Attorney's Office

### Legal Athletes

The Legal Athletes Group is a fun and informal way to meet fellow MWL members while breaking a sweat! Our goal is to create a supportive space for active women and promote a balanced, healthy lifestyle. Our events will range from group yoga, spin, zumba, walking, running, rollerblading, golf, racquet sports, and pretty much any other activity where we can get our heart rates up and enjoy some fitness and fun! We anticipate that formal group gatherings will be held quarterly (and may be subject to a small fee, depending on our planned activity and head count), with the option for more informal subgroup meetings.

Chair:  
Autumn Gear, Barnes & Thornburg LLP

### Legal Wine Lovers

The MWL Legal Wine Lovers consists of members who enjoy tasting and learning more about wine and wine-related topics. Our goals are to increase our wine knowledge, provide educational opportunities by inviting guest speakers who are industry experts or leaders, meeting new members using a common interest as the draw, networking, and FUN!

Co-Chairs:  
Jan Ballman, Paradigm / Veritext  
Nikki Keirnes, Keirnes Law Firm, PLLC

### Master Lawyers

Geared towards MWL's more experienced members (Admitted to the bar at least 10+ years or 35+ years old), the goal of the MWL Master Lawyers Affinity Group is to provide an opportunity for more senior members to meet, support and network with one another, and discuss experiences shared by women who have attained leadership positions within the legal profession.

Co-Chairs:  
Heidi Fessler, Innova Law Group, PLLC  
Barbara Klas, Attorney at Law

### Professional Parents

The MWL Professional Parents Affinity Group hosts monthly luncheons and events, which provide a relaxed environment for MWL's working parents to meet with one another, network, and share their experiences, challenges and successes, as it relates to their families and their professional careers. The group typically meets on the 2nd & 4th Thursday of every month at 11:00 am online via Zoom.

Chair:  
Alona Rindal, US Bank National Association

### Public Sector

The goal of the MWL Public Sector Affinity Group is to create opportunities for MWL members who work in the public sector to build their networks. Networking creates a sense of community and helps members understand how different public sector entities function and interrelate. The MWL Public Sector Affinity Group plans to meet quarterly, usually in St. Paul or Minneapolis, and occasionally virtually. Most events will be social but with occasional topic-focused meetings if interest exists. The MWL Public Sector Affinity Group plans to meet every other month, usually in St. Paul, but sometimes in Minneapolis. Most events will be social but with occasional topic-focused meetings if interest exists.

Co-Chairs:  
Anne Sexton, MNSure  
Priyanka Premo,  
Minnesota State Senate

### RISE: Emerging Lawyers

RISE: Emerging Lawyers Affinity Group is aimed at being an authentic and vibrant group of MWL members who support and connect with one another in their first through fifth years beyond law school. Goals include: 1) Promoting further satisfaction for women in the practice of law; 2) providing individual professional development opportunities; 3) sharing of resources and the exchange of ideas; 4) emphasizing networking, connection, and the power of community and relationship building; and 5) encourage a space for new lawyers to connect with each other and have fun while doing it. Gatherings will be held on at least a quarterly basis.

Co-Chairs:  
Maria Brekke, Nilan Johnson Lewis PA  
Molly Hough, Chestnut Cambronne PA

### Solo & Small Firm

Join other MWL members who are solo and small firm practitioners to discuss issues of common interest. Meetings are held on the first Friday of each month (second Friday on holiday weekends) from 9:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Co-Chairs:  
Chris Courtney, Courtney Law Office  
Mary Szondy, Attorney at Law

# 2022-2023 MWL Committees

## Awards & Recognition

The purpose of the Awards and Recognition Committee is to honor, recognize and celebrate individuals, entities and legal employers who 1) represent the highest ideals of the legal profession; 2) enhance the status, influence and effectiveness of women lawyers; and/or 3) advance MWL's mission. To that end, the Committee administers MWL's Myra Bradwell and Leadership Awards, which are presented annually at MWL's Annual Meeting. The Committee also identifies and submits nominations to external organizations and entities on behalf of MWL, which further the Committee's purpose.

Co-Chairs:  
Uyen Campbell,  
University of St. Thomas School of Law  
Karen Opp, Korn Ferry  
Tina Syring, Lewis Brisbois

## Community Action & Advocacy

The Community Action & Advocacy Committee facilitates greater community service and public policy programming and activities as defined by MWL's mission and values, and approved by the Board. Current focus areas include: 1) violence against women; 2) pay equity; 3) access to justice; and 4) girl empowerment.

Co-Chairs:  
Kelsey Kelley, Anoka County Attorney's Office  
Nicolet Lyon,  
Law Office of Katherine L. MacKinnon

## Diversity & Inclusion

Guided by MWL's Diversity and Inclusion statement, the Diversity and Inclusion Committee will lead MWL's diversity efforts by identifying and developing specific goals and initiatives to advance diversity and inclusion, both internally and outward-facing. Subsequently, it will communicate MWL's goals to all other MWL leadership groups and provide support to ensure each group's related efforts and implementation. Furthermore, the Committee will develop MWL's Diversity and Inclusion Plan each year and work to implement over the course of the fiscal year.

Co-Chairs:  
Deborah Autrey, Nilan Johnson Lewis PA  
Mary Szondy, Attorney at Law  
Amy Taber, Prime Therapeutics

## Publications

The Publications Committee is responsible for producing MWL's quarterly publication *With Equal Right*, ensuring its content and format supports MWL's strategic objectives and goals. Meetings are held on a quarterly basis.

Co-Chairs:  
Laura Arneson, Beckman Coulter Inc.  
Deborah Autrey, Nilan Johnson Lewis PA  
Jennifer Moreau, Barna Guzy & Steffen Ltd.

## Equity

The MWL Equity Committee is tasked with general oversight for MWL's projects and initiatives related to the systemic advancement and success of women attorneys. Current Equity Committee activities include: coordination and oversight of the MWL Media Project, activities related to attaining nonprofit and corporate board positions, the judicial pipeline initiative, the MWL Gender Data Project, the Pay Equity Project, and other related initiatives in support of MWL's Strategic Plan.

Co-Chairs:  
Katie Bennett, Robins Kaplan  
Amy Boyle, MJSB Employment Justice  
A. Elizabeth Burnett, Robins Kaplan LLP  
Kelly Clark, Heinz Law  
Angela Keise,  
Minnesota Attorney General's Office  
Virginia McCalmont,  
Forsgren Fisher McCalmont Demarea  
Tysver LLP  
Elizabeth Patton, Fox Rothschild LLP  
Trisha Volpe, Barnes and Thornburg LLP

## Membership & Engagement

The Membership and Engagement Committee implements best practices for increasing overall MWL membership through its recruitment and retention efforts, with an emphasis on welcoming members with diverse backgrounds, identities, experiences and viewpoints. Furthermore, the Committee's efforts enhance and deepen engagement i) between MWL and its members, and ii) across and among MWL members.

Co-Chairs:  
Cody Blades, Fafinski Mark & Johnson, P.A.  
Wendy Badger, Tennant Company  
Theresa Johnson, LifeWorks  
Ji Hae Kim, Target Corporation

## Programming: CLE & MMM

The CLE Subcommittee coordinates professional development and leadership events that support women attorneys in: 1) addressing issues of bias and inequity within the profession; 2) developing core competencies; 3) building skill and expertise within specific legal/practice areas; 4) developing leadership skills; 5) attaining leadership positions outside of the legal community; 6) developing and supporting mentoring relationships.

Co-Chairs:  
Emerald Gratz, Minnesota Supreme Court  
Andrea Hoversten,  
Geraghty O'Loughlin & Kenney

## Programming: Networking

The Networking Subcommittee coordinates MWL's stand-alone networking events. Additionally, the Committee provides support and oversight for networking events held in conjunction with other MWL events. The Committee also works to create a welcoming and accessible environment across all MWL activities, to foster opportunities for members to develop meaningful connections and relationships with one another.

Co-Chairs:  
Molly Hough, Chestnut Cambronre PA  
Ginny McCalmont,  
Forsgren Fisher McCalmont Demarea  
Tysver LLP  
Cassie Merrick, MADEL PA

## Programming: Signature Events

The Signature Events Committee provides general oversight and coordination for the MWL Rosalie Wahl Leadership Lecture, The MWL Leadership Institute, and the MWL Annual Meeting. Activities may include 1) assistance in coordinating event logistics; 2) development of overall event theme and structure; 3) securing speakers (s); 4) general publicity and marketing support; and 5) volunteer coordination and support.

Co-Chairs:  
Laura Bartlow, Zelle LLP  
Kelly Lelo, Snodgrass Law LLC  
Lisa Lodin Peralta,  
Minnesota Attorney General's Office  
Lynn Walters, Blackstock Walters LLC



## MWL Seeks Volunteers

The following MWL leadership groups are actively seeking volunteer involvement:

- CLE & MWL Member Monday Committee
- Community Action & Advocacy Committee
- Membership & Engagement Committee
- Pay Equity Sub-Committee
- Publications Committee
- Signature Events Committee

Reach out directly to the leaders of these Committees, or any other MWL group, to find out how you can get involved.

Sign-up for group meeting and activity notices via The MWL Exchange.

Visit the MWL website for further details about all upcoming events, activities and opportunities.

Learn more at [www.mwlawyers.org](http://www.mwlawyers.org).

The Official Journal of  
Minnesota Women Lawyers

Minnesota Women Lawyers, Inc.  
600 Nicollet Mall, Suite 390B  
Minneapolis, MN 55402

## Renew Your MWL Membership Today!

Current MWL members are invited to renew their Minnesota Women Lawyers membership!

All memberships expired on June 30, 2022. Together, MWL members focus on advancing the success of women lawyers and striving for a just society. Take full advantage of membership benefits such as networking, leadership & mentoring opportunities, social events, community action initiatives and more. As MWL looks forward to the coming year and beyond, a continued commitment from individual members will be key to our ongoing success.

RENEW ONLINE at [www.mwlawyers.org](http://www.mwlawyers.org).

Are you an engaged member of Minnesota Women Lawyers?  
Help MWL expand its network and invite a colleague to join us!



MWL Values:

**Equity:** Promoting equity and inclusion within the legal profession and community.

**Leadership:** Developing women lawyers into leaders.

**Community:** Engaging and celebrating a diverse community of women lawyers.