

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Michelle Kohut



As I prepared to be installed as president, what struck me about the Women's Bar is that it is the Women's Bar Association of Illinois, yet about 99% of our membership is from Cook County and about 100% of our activities take place in Cook County. I would like the Women's Bar to truly become the Women's Bar Association of Illinois. Being a statewide organization has been a topic of discussion that dates back to our roots.

In 1937, then President Elsa Beck, recommended a downstate meeting to make the WBAI truly a state bar. Yet, it never came to fruition. To connect with other professionals throughout the state is not only good for the growth of this organization, but also for our individual growth. We become empowered through the associations we make when networking.

When this organization was formed in 1914 it focused its efforts on the political issues of the day and helping women get hired. It was formed with the purpose to promulgate, promote, advance and protect the interests of women.

Our purpose remains the same and is as relevant today as it was 99 years ago.

I am honored to follow in the footsteps of the leaders of this organization who had the foresight to recognize issues that were as relevant then as they are now to the progress of women in this profession.

Because it is still important to be informed of legislation affecting women, I have formed a legislative committee to apprise our membership of bills that are of interest. The committee will also be hosting a legislative reception in Springfield to connect with our lawmakers.

Also, helping our members find jobs is still as relevant today as it was in 1914.

Although we have all heard that women make up the majority of students in law school, we fail to maintain that statistic proportionately upon graduation. What we see is that if women do enter legal careers after law school, they fail to stay, or if they do, they fail to advance at the same rate as men.

The more we network, however, the more of an opportunity we have to change that. Networking opens the door to advancing business relations; it opens the door to keeping women in the profession as well as transitioning them back into the profession as they raise their families.

To further quote President Elsa Beck, "We are a small group and need the support of every woman attorney if we are to gain recognition and the positions we seek." Although written in 1937, it still applies today.

As we approach a century of progress, I have set forth an agenda that helps this organization attain the goal of truly becoming a statewide organization.

We will continue to host events here in Chicago, but our membership committee has committed to traveling the state and working with other county bar associations. Not only will we be hosting a legislative reception, but also an event in Peoria with past president Karen Diamond; we will also be taking advantage of technology and offering further CLE webinars, and lunch time seminars for those that practice in the suburbs but come downtown for court. We are also working on a referral list serve for our members.

We become empowered through networking with each other by opening these doors and making connections. We look forward to connecting with you!

I look forward to making many connections, and connecting others as we come together for a successful bar year.

Gratefully,

*Michelle Kohut*