



We Still Need Women's Bar Associations by HELEN PERRY GRIMWOOD

JUSTICE LORNA LOCKWOOD, the first woman to serve on Arizona's Supreme Court, planted the seeds for the Arizona Women Lawyers Association. During the 1960s and 1970s, she invited every woman lawyer to her lunch table at the Arizona Club, every week. By 1976, the group had grown too big for one table, but the roots for the Arizona Association of Women Lawyers had taken hold. In 1980, this Phoenix group merged with its Tucson counterpart to become the Arizona Women Lawyers Association.

The AWLA now boasts a diverse membership of more than 850 women and men from a wide range of practice areas, work environments and levels of experience, including law students, associates, partners, members of academia, in-house counsel, lawyers who have chosen other careers and members of the state and federal judiciary. The AWLA is comprised of two chapters-Maricopa (which includes Northern Arizona counties) and Southern Arizona-to address members' needs and goals at the local level. In keeping with the tradition established by Justice Lockwood, the Maricopa Chapter still meets monthly at the Arizona Club for lunch.

Part of the impetus for the AWLA's formation was that traditional bar associations did not actively support women's entrance into the profession and did not provide a helpful or supportive forum for many of their concerns.

Conditions have changed. Through the efforts of many, the traditional bar associations have worked hard to become more diverse and to foster diversity. In fact, of the 26 voting members of the State Bar Board of Governors, eight are women, and during the last 20 years, three of the 20 State Bar presidents have been women. Not only has the State Bar adopted policies of inclusion, but it is constantly working to implement them.

Nevertheless, women's bar associations must continue to provide focused leadership and a voice for issues important to women in the profession. What has changed is that the traditional bars, the judiciary and others in our legal community encourage this-in fact, they depend on it. They depend on the women's bar to keep track of both progress and failure, to speak up, and to advocate constructive and appropriate change.

Of course, there is still work to do. No longer are women excluded from the legal profession, but they still have not gained much access to the social and business networks that are crucial to business development. No longer are law firms off-limits for women with children, but satisfactory flexible schedules are still the exception. No longer are women categorically excluded from litigation practice, but good training programs to help them hone trial skills are still few and far between. No longer are women's innate qualifications for "forensic strife" the subject of open debate, but they still do not benefit from the presumption of competence that their male counterparts frequently enjoy.

It should come as no surprise that women lawyers are still underrepresented in many law firm partnerships, the judiciary and law school faculties, even when the figures are controlled for age and experience. "The pipeline leaks, and if we wait for time to correct the problem, we will be waiting for a very long time," observes Prof. Deborah L. Rhode, chair of the ABA Commission on Women in the Profession.

Perhaps this explains why membership and interest in women's bar associations have never been higher. They keep growing because they continue to help women lawyers in dealing with issues of common concern.

The AWLA is a good example. It provides CLE skills programs specifically tailored to women advocates. It monitors the judicial appointment process and the advancement of women to law firm partnerships. Its business development forums have helped women learn more effective marketing techniques. In the tradition of Justice Lockwood's lunch group, it also offers a special camaraderie. It's a place where women lawyers make no apologies for who they are or what they do, where they can support and celebrate each other's successes and where they can help each other deal with professional and personal challenges.

Women's bar associations also assist one another. The National Conference of Women Bar Associations serves as an umbrella for women's bar associations throughout the country. It conducts leadership summits, provides a national voice for the associations and facilitates the exchange of ideas and experiences. This year, it began hosting a Web site and an e-mail list serve for women in bar leadership throughout the country.

As long as women's bar associations continue to serve the needs of women in the profession, they will continue to flourish, and the entire profession will be the better for it. Helen Perry Grimwood is a past president of the Arizona Women Lawyers Association, a Vice President of the National Conference of Women Bar Associations and a member of the Arizona State Bar Board of Governors. She has practiced civil litigation in Phoenix since 1980.

Originally published in *Arizona Attorney* magazine, May 2001, copyright State Bar of Arizona.