Women in the Profession Fall Retreat
Save the Dates: Friday and Saturday, Nov. 4-5

Mark your calendar now so that you don’t miss all that this year’s retreat has to offer! On Friday, Nov. 4 – Saturday Nov. 5, 2022, attorneys from across the commonwealth will meet at the Hotel Hershey for the annual fall retreat. This year’s versatile theme, “Lessons Learned from My Clients,” is sure to inspire great conversation. Whether your client base stems from private citizens, corporations or state agencies, we are all learning valuable lessons along the way. The chance to share those lessons and build upon them in a way that improves our performance, competency and communication skills as practitioners will make this year’s retreat beneficial from a professional and personal standpoint.

While the fall retreat offers meaningful learning opportunities to earn continuing legal education credits, what brings us back together year after year is the comradery and the chance to collectively exhale and gain strength from one another. WIP is a representation of attorneys from diverse fields of law. What we find in this unique blend of women is that our similarities far outweigh our differences and no matter who you sit next to, you come away with your tools a little bit sharper, your soul refreshed and your resolve to be a phenomenal attorney validated in a way you didn’t realize you needed.

Highlights for the conference include a special kick-off program on Friday afternoon, “Health, Wealth and Bringing Your Best Self,” and several panel discussions throughout the two-day event including, “Who Are Our Clients?” and “Professional Liability.”

We are also thrilled that the opening dinner for this year’s retreat will feature a keynote address by Nilam Sanghvi, legal director of the Pennsylvania Innocence Project. The keynote address will be followed by our popular story slam activity — lots of fun, you don’t want to miss it. WIP also intends to offer a public service opportunity in conjunction with the Pennsylvania Innocence Project. More details about all the events will be available soon.
Sign up for the WIP Mentoring Program

By Vicci Madden & Andrea Tuominen, co-chairs, WIP Mentoring Committee

The Mentoring Program of the Commission on Women in the Profession has been established to assist women lawyers in attaining their goals within the profession, including among other possible goals, positions of leadership within the legal community. Over the years, this program has successfully paired members together to form lasting relationships that have, in many instances, provided an opportunity to share advice, network and facilitate movement into leadership positions. In turn, the program allows the opportunity for mentors to share their knowledge and experiences and to be part of a larger movement in empowering members.

As we kick off the 2022-2023 mentoring program, we hope that you take advantage of this unique opportunity either to share your experience or to learn from someone who has been where you are now. To sign up for this year, please review the WIP Mentoring Program Outline and complete the application. Return your application to Ursula Marks at Ursula.marks@pabar.org no later than Sept. 30. The Mentoring Committee will make matches based on your background, geographic location and other factors.

In the last few years, we have all discovered that we can connect in-person, via technology, or a combination of those options. Please be certain to indicate your preferred method of meeting on the form so that we can match you with someone with similar preferences.

Finally, we invite you to join the Mentoring Committee to help plan activities for the 2022-2023 mentoring year. We especially encourage members from the northwest and southeast parts of the state to join so that we have a geographically well-rounded committee. If you would like to join the committee, you may do so by clicking on this link, and then signing up for the Mentoring Committee on WIP’s webpage: WIP Committee Sign-Up.

Thank you — we look forward to hearing from you!
An Interview with a Newly Solo Attorney

Interviewer: Tara Hutchinson (TH)
Interviewee: Sarah Yerger, Yerger Law (SCY)

TH: When did you go solo but, more importantly, why?

SCY: The “when” is easy — the end of 2021. The “why” was a series of events leading up to the “when.” You could call it a perfect storm — COVID, paid off student loans in 2020, son graduated in 2021, and I realized that time was ticking with my daughter set to graduate high school in 2024. COVID was busy and during COVID and leading up to opening my own firm, I had health problems, family health issues and both of my boxer dogs pass within a year of each other. Everyone dealt with a lot during COVID but I felt particularly changed by the events that occurred during that time. I started researching and putting my business plan together in early 2021, hoping to resign from my law firm in 2023 when I turned 55 to get my retirement savings without penalty and then start my solo firm using those resources. But the opportunity arose for me to make the jump in early November 2021, and I decided I was emotionally and practically ready for the challenge (no time like the present) to get my business started.

TH: So the pandemic played a large role in your decision to go solo?

SCY: Absolutely! I was wedded to a traditional office and a traditional practice but the pandemic flipped those ideas on their head. I never thought I could work from home long term and be productive but was extremely productive in 2020 from my home. The pandemic has definitely normalized remote meetings, and it’s not only normalized remote meetings with clients, but it’s also made lawyers and clients both realize that those are just more convenient. And I think that now clients are accustomed to meeting with doctors online, lawyers online, all kinds of providers and getting deliveries online. So very few people want to go back to how things were done. I think with courts, sadly, waiting for cases to be scheduled, waiting for your case to be called use to be a profit center for some law firms. You would basically have to sit in court and wait for a case to be called, and that’s been taken away and has had a financial impact on some law firms.

TH: What was it like to go out on your own as a solo practitioner?

SCY: Exciting and also terrifying at first. In my 29 years of practicing law, I had always had terrific support staff. When I went out on my own, I did not even know how to print an address on an envelope! The day I opened up shop, which was the day after I left my large law firm, I had no idea how many clients would agree to come with me, and I knew there was no way I could successfully serve the huge clients. But I had faith that I was a great lawyer with lots of experience and lots of friends and contacts in the community. About a dozen or so of my smaller to mid-size clients chose to come with me, one of which had a hearing on the horizon, and I was off to the races! People who knew me trusted me and sent me work. Although several of my cases have settled in the last nine months, I have continued to grow my business and acquire new clients. I’m so thankful for those clients who chose to come with me and for the people who believed in me early on. They made it possible.

TH: Tell us about your areas of practice.

SCY: My professional roots are in litigation and employment-related work, and I continue to do it because I have

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always enjoyed it. There is something very satisfying about representing a businessperson who has a plan and vision. I help them achieve their goals, so if they succeed, it means I succeeded. But now that I own my own firm, I can also help individuals as I am doing now — unemployment, discrimination, contract disputes — helping a person or family.

TH: What do you love about running your own practice and being your own boss? Conversely, what are some challenges that come with being a small business owner?

SCY: Although I love being a lawyer and representing clients, I have to say that I also love the business aspect. I love making new relationships with other professionals, engaging with people via social media, conducting presentations and being creative with how I offer more value to my clients. Being a small business owner comes with the challenge of being the boss and being responsible for every decision. Although I like to think that I know everything, that is absolutely not the case (could not print an envelope!). One of the hardest parts for me is the fear of making the wrong decisions. I'm grateful for my friends and other small and solo attorneys who I rely on for support and advice.

TH: Tell us about the support from other small and solo firms.

SCY: When the announcement was made that I was opening my own firm, so many small and solos reached out to me to offer advice and guidance. What I have learned is that solos help one another in a way that larger firms don't. When I was contemplating going solo and I thought I'm going to jump, but am I going to land on firm ground; and friends who were solo said, “Sarah, you will not believe how much work you're going to get because you're a solo that you're not getting now because you're part of a big firm.” It is true. I say the same thing to lawyers now. And, the thing is, there’s something about working in a small firm where people know you have to be efficient and you’re watching all the pennies. They will come to you and give you a case that they wouldn’t if you were in a big firm, which I guess they instinctively know is more than they could afford. So, that was absolutely true for me and for every single lawyer that I’ve talked to, and we’re all astonished that this is the case, but that’s the way the world works.

TH: What were the reactions when you told other lawyers, whether they were your friends or opposing counsel that you occasionally run into on the streets, that you’ve gone out on your own and left your big law firm? How did you deal with them?

SCY: Most people were extremely supportive and excited for me. I had, and continue to have, many cheerleaders and supporters. Some of them thought I had lost my marbles. I kind of said I just wanted to give it a shot, I thought it would be more satisfying, and I wanted to be my own boss and shape the work I do and the clients I serve.

TH: How does your office differ from other law firms?

SCY: Law had became less of a profession and more of a business, and I wanted to go back to fundamental relationship-building. The attorney-client relationship is sacred. Conversations between an attorney and a client were not all that different from discussions between close friends or family members, and that’s how I wanted to practice. I work very hard to manage my office by focusing on the relationship with the client. It is important to me that my clients know what is happening with their matters, understand why things happen, and remain involved with the process. Given the modern realities of the practice of law, it is not always possible to achieve these goals but I make the effort to come as close as possible. I have to deal with business issues since I make my living doing this, but I chose to earn a living in a service profession. I try to remember that the operative word is “service.”

TH: That’s a very good tip that we’ve got to make sure really sinks in. Did you find that you were able to give more attention to clients out on your own after you handpicked the ones you got? Or didn’t it really matter? Were you able to deliver just as good a service as a small firm by yourself as with a big firm backing you?

SCY: I definitely think I give better service to the clients I have because I have fewer of them. They are of paramount importance to me, obviously. They know that they can contact me directly and get me quickly. It’s trickier with clients that are prospective clients who are kind of feeling me out.

“I try to remember that the operative word is ‘service.’”

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An Interview with a Newly Solo Attorney
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TH: What worries you moving forward?
SCY: Getting clients. When I was in government, the work never stopped — someone was always suing the Commonwealth, and I had more work than I could handle. Then in the law firms, other attorneys called me in the firm to help with their clients’ employment or litigation needs. But, I’m not defending the Commonwealth or getting those internal calls anymore. I did not think through how I would develop my client base. I thought “I’m going to have this amazing website (which I do) and I’m going to get on referral lists. I’m going to spend money on Click to Pay. I’m going to get on Google Business, LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube and TikTok.” But, what I have learned in the last nine months is that networking and word of mouth are the best ways for developing clients. And, of course, doing great work. Clients are coming in — slower than I would like — and everyone says they will come and to just be patient. I think networking and word of mouth is how to get clients (with a little social media sprinkled in) but that all takes time. My firm is in its infancy so I need to go easy on myself and be patient. In the end, I have been practicing for a long time and many people know me and know my work. I feel like I’m in a much better place in business development than many others who are doing the solo thing.

TH: What are some of your favorite things about opening your own practice?
SCY: I love my boss (that would be me!) She believes in me, supports me and does not care when I spend time with my family. I also enjoy time with family, including my four-legged one. I work from home and my dog Snoopy is my constant companion. He seems to know when I need fresh air, and he’s a reminder about self-care.

WIP Wellness Luncheon Series

The WIP Quality of Life subcommittee continues its series of virtual wellness lunches. Bring your own lunch and join us to have an open discussion about the unique issues women lawyers face every day. Sessions begin at noon and end by 1 p.m. The session dates and topics for the rest of the year are listed below. We hope to see you there!

Friday, Sept. 9, noon
“Playing the game” – Navigating interoffice politics
Moderated by Kim Meyer

Friday, Oct. 28, noon
“Making your voice matter” – Paving the way for inclusivity in firm culture
Moderated by Francine Friedman Griesing

Click here for the schedule with Zoom links.
Francine Friedman Griesing Commentary in BuzzFeedNews Article

Francine Friedman Griesing gave her insight to @BuzzFeedNews on the harsh restrictions nursing or pregnant mothers face when taking the bar exam – making it even harder for women to become lawyers. Read the full article here: https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/juliareinstein/bar-exam-is-especially-difficult-pregnant-nursing-people

Marie Milie Jones Panelist in Wall Street Women of Faith Program

Marie Milie Jones recently served as a panelist at the Wall Street Women of Faith program presented by the Catholic Finance Association in New York City. Kelly Evans, anchor with CNBC; Mary Brunson, vice president and co-founder, Investing for Catholics, a division of Index Fund Advisors Inc.; and Susan Michel, CEO of Glen Eagle, discussed the market outlook for women in financial services, addressed opportunities presented to them as well as obstacles faced, and highlighted the role of faith in their journey.

Ann Begler Honored with the Pittsburgh Action Against Rape (PAAR) Legacy Award

Ann Begler was honored with the Pittsburgh Action Against Rape (PAAR) Legacy Award on April 30 at the organization’s Teal Ball and 50th anniversary celebration. PAAR, which has one of the oldest crisis centers in the country, provides support to victims of sexual violence.

Begler is an attorney, mediator and executive coach in Pittsburgh. In her early years as an attorney, she represented PAAR in litigation over the organization’s refusal to turn over its notes concerning a client. The end result of the litigation was that the notes were deemed not admissible as they did not qualify under evidentiary rules as a direct verbatim statement. While a successful result (this was the first case in the country that centered on efforts to examine this type of record), through the efforts of many people and organizations, specific confidentiality legislation was passed, challenged and ultimately led to a court determined right of privacy protection for victims of sexual assault. Begler represented the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape as Counsel for Amicus Curiae in those cases.

Philadelphia Bar Association Honors Roberta Liebenberg with the 2022 Justice Sonia Sotomayor Award

Roberta “Bobbi” Liebenberg was honored by the Philadelphia Bar Association with the 2022 Justice Sonia Sotomayor Award, which recognizes an individual attorney, jurist, law firm, corporate legal department or other organization that has made substantial and lasting contributions to the association’s goal of promoting full and equal participation and inclusion by all attorneys in Philadelphia’s legal community. https://www.law.edu/news-and-events/2022/alumni/2022-0613-alum-news-liebenberg-award.html
Voices & Views is a publication of the Pennsylvania Bar Association (PBA) Commission on Women in the Profession and is published by the Communications Committee three times per year. The purpose of the publication is to facilitate communication among the membership of the commission on topics and events of general interest to women lawyers. The editors of Voices & Views reserve the right to accept or reject any submission and to edit any submission to ensure its suitability for publication, its adherence to the Mission Statement of the Communications Committee and its furtherance of the objectives of the Commission on Women in the Profession.

The articles and reports contained in Voices & Views reflect the views of the writer and do not necessarily represent the position of the commission, the editors of Voices & Views or the Pennsylvania Bar Association.

Mission Statement
It is the mission of the PBA WIP Communications Committee to foster improved communication among its members in the furtherance of the goals of the commission. To this end, the publication, Voices & Views, provides a forum for professional and open exchange among the WIP membership on all issues related to women and the law. Voices & Views shall be utilized for the following purposes:

- To publicize opportunities and events that may be of interest to the WIP membership;
- To provide information to the membership on topics that may be of general interest to women lawyers;
- To reach a wider audience and increase the visibility of the commission;
- To inform the WIP membership of the projects and goals of the commission; and
- To share information with the WIP membership regarding accomplishments of the members, other

Contribute to Voices & Views
The editors of Voices & Views encourage our membership to contribute articles and announcements, including articles on your area of practice, topics relating to women and the law, book reviews, save-the-date notices, members in the news and photos of members at events.

The submission deadline for the next issue is March 1, 2023.

Please send information, news and articles to the co-editors:
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