

**Founding President, Elizabeth Peck's
Comments on the occasion of the
Finger Lakes Women's Bar Association
Tenth Anniversary Celebration
June 6, 2017 at The Country Club of Ithaca.**

To see you all here today, a decade after we began this journey, almost takes my breath away. 10 years! Who woulda thunk it?

Thank you for taking time out of your complex lives to spend a few hours together this evening as we consider our history and look toward our future.

Along with Deirdre Hay and Kim Rothman, I was one of the founding mothers of our chapter and served as our first president. Alyssa asked me share with you how and why the FLWBA started. And, I also want to give you a few of my thoughts on why a women's bar association is more important today that it was just a decade ago.

In October 2006, leaders from the Women's Bar Association of the State of New York invited Ithaca area women lawyers to breakfast to discuss the formation of a new chapter of its organization. With all due respect to our WBASNY colleagues, I don't remember much about the details of the meeting other than the luke-warm scrambled eggs.

But what I do remember as clear as day is the conversation I struck up with Kim Rothman after the breakfast ended. We'd never met before, but on that sunny morning on the sidewalk in front of the Hilton Garden Inn, we shared a spark of inspiration to start this organization. We were both fairly new to the Ithaca legal community and were looking for ways to connect with other lawyers – specifically women lawyers – to enhance our personal and professional lives. This seemed like just the thing we were both looking for. In the coming months, Deidre joined us for our frequent planning sessions at the Moosewood Café, and in March 2007, the FLWBA was born.

When I spoke at our first installation dinner in the fall of that year, I tried to articulate why we started a chapter.

Here's what I said,

“WHY here and WHY now? Honestly, I still don't know. For me, what started as a way connect with local employers has become about making new friends. For you it may be about earning more CLE credits. Or perhaps you're new to the area and are looking for a job. Maybe you've been here a very long time and wanted to meet new people. Or you are a small firm practitioner who could use a few more referrals. And, maybe it is all of these things . . . or none of these things. . .”

As you can see, it was clear as mud.

Honestly, I was just grateful that we had gotten our chapter off the ground with enough dues-paying members to join WBASNY. Why exactly we had come together and what exactly we'd do was a bit mysterious, but I had a hunch that we were on to something very, very good.

Looking back at all we've built together over the last 10 years, my hunch was right on the money. The FLWBA has become an important member of our community and our lives. We have supported each other's careers through education and networking. We have made good friends. We have given back through volunteer efforts and fundraising for non-profits. We have made our voices heard on local issues and state-wide matters. We have developed our leadership skills, honed our event-planning talents, and even learned something about local wine.

Back on that sunny day in the fall of 2006, things looked pretty good for women. That fall, Katie Couric became the first woman to host a major network evening news broadcast, Nancy Pelosi would soon become the first woman speaker of the House, and Oprah Winfrey was the highest paid TV entertainer in the United States.

We had come a long way, baby, and the future was looking bright.

As I stand here before you in June of 2017, I see that our work is far from done. We live in a time when women's hard-fought gains are slipping away. This fall, we watched a divisive presidential campaign in which the role of women, and men's attitudes toward them, took center stage. Our nation is led by a president who - through actions, words, and tweets - makes his feelings about women clear. At the national level, male leaders put women's issues on the back burner. Women partners at major law firms are suing their firms for gender discrimination, seeking millions of dollars in damages. Women's frustration was on display a few short months ago as women - and men alike - marched by the 10s of thousands in DC and around the nation on January 21.

We are looking at a present that looks more like 1967 than 2017.

As I look ahead to our next decade, I see our mandate much more clearly. Both as women and as lawyers, as individuals and as a group, we have a lot to contribute.

First, we must work harder to form alliances with people who share our values. I think we can all agree that equality, opportunity and fairness are core values for our chapter and ourselves. We need to ally with others who share those values. We need to see connections between the rights of women and the rights of people of color, minority religions, the LGBTQ community, people with disabilities, and non-US citizens. Now more than ever, we need to build alliances with men who share these values to create strong networks to safeguard all of our rights. Connectivity and networking allow us to build stronger personal bonds, share our visions, understand others' perspectives, and work toward shared goals.

Next, we need to support each other and those who are coming after us. Mentorship is important, of course, but sponsorship may be even more crucial to the development of young women lawyers today. Sponsors lift others up, give them opportunities, teach them, make sure they have a seat at the table, coach them to succeed. We all need to see ourselves as sponsors of the next

generation of women. And, we need to talk about sponsorship with our colleagues – male and female. Promoting the success of women is all of our responsibility.

Third, we need to recognize our important role as lawyers in a time where our democracy and the rule of law is being challenged. Watching lawyers rush to airports in January to represent foreign citizens seeking entry into the US was a reminder of how very vital lawyers can be. Lawyers are in a special position to ensure that the law is fairly drafted, fairly interpreted, fairly applied and fairly enforced - in all circumstances. I want us to think about how we can lean on the word “BAR” in the Finger Lakes Women’s Bar Association.

We are poised to lead. We have already pitched a big tent with a membership which spans the spectrum of experience. We need to look for opportunities to bring more people into our tent, ally with our colleagues, sponsor young lawyers, and think about how we can collectively and individually work toward shared values of fairness, equality, and opportunity.

As I look around this room at old friends and new faces, I see our power and potential. I look forward to what our next 10 years - and 100 years - will bring.

Thank you.