

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FINGER LAKES WOMEN'S BAR ASSOCIATION'S FIRST DECADE

FORMATION:

On October 19, 2006, a breakfast meeting was held at the Holiday Inn Ithaca to engage area attorneys interested in forming a local WBASNY chapter. Attorneys Elaine Avery, Linda Chiaverini and Irene Villacci represented the Women's Bar Association of New York (WBASNY) which hosted the event. Following that first gathering, Elizabeth (Liz) Peck, Kimberly (Kim) Rothman and Deirdre Hay worked for months to create the framework of WBASNY's 18th chapter, the Finger Lakes Women's Bar Association. On March 24, 2007, Liz, Kim, Kelly A. Damm and Mari Townsend attended the WBASNY Board meeting at which FLWBA was officially ratified as a Chapter with jurisdiction including Cayuga, Chemung, Cortland, Schuyler, Seneca, Steuben, Tioga, Tompkins and Yates Counties. Liz became founding President, Kim the Treasurer and Deirdre the first chapter Delegate to the WBASNY Board of Directors.

PURPOSE:

Article 3 of the original FLWBA set forth the purposes and responsibilities of the chapter. The By-Laws were amended in 2017, and the paragraph renumbered, but the original purposes were left largely intact:

2.1 The purpose of this Chapter will be in accordance with that of WBASNY and to: (a) establish and direct policies and issue policy statements on issues of local significance, especially those relating to women lawyers and women generally, and to bring such issues to the attention of WBASNY for further endorsement and action; (b) to cooperate with, aid and support organizations and causes which advance the status and progress of women in society; (c) to encourage education of lawyers; (d) to promote the fair and equal administration of justice; and (e) to inform members and disseminate information to them.

Policy:

A small but mighty chapter, FLWBA has influenced WBASNY policies and policy statements through the activities of our members on WBASNY's board and committees. A partial list of our members and some of the WBASNY roles they have most recently impacted follows:

- Susan Brock –Environmental Law Committee co-chair
- Leslie Danks Burke – Environmental Law Committee member
- Kelly Damm – Legislative Committee co-chair
- Maggi Fowler – Judicial Screening Committee alt. member
- Mariette Geldenhuys - LGBT Rights Committee co-chair
- Sujata Gibson – Domestic Violence Committee member
- Deirdre Hay – Vice President 2016-2017; WBASNY Recording Secretary 2015-2016; WBASNY Corresponding Secretary 2014-2015; Environmental Law Committee Member
- Sital Kalanty – Human Rights Committee member
- Deborah Wolf Miller – CLE Committee member

- Beth Reiter - Judicial Screening Committee member
- Yifat Shaltiel – FLWBA Delegate to the WBASBTY Board; Nominations Committee member; Health Committee co-chair
- Diane Withiam – Children’s Rights Committee member

Cooperation, aid and support:

FLWBA Founders recognized the importance of building networks with organizations active in the region whose mission was compatible with our own, especially with Cornell Law School. Women with affiliations at Cornell emerged as leaders. Its faculty has engaged with FLWBA practicing attorney members in a close and mutually supportive collaboration, including leadership of local committees, such as the FLWBA International Women’s Rights Committee formed by Elizabeth Brundige and Sital Kalanty. FLWBA regularly welcomes Cornell Faculty as speakers at its CLE and other programs. FLWBA encourages the participation of law students in at our meetings, and our members have participated in campus programs such as legal career panels and as case competition judges. In 2016, the Cornell Women’s Law Coalition supported FLWBA’s voter registration drive by organizing an event on campus, helping WBASNY to achieve its goal of registering 1000 new voters before the presidential election.

FLWBA has engaged closely with many area organizations, through co-sponsorship of programs, participating in fund-raisers, making donations, and participation in events, including: Women’s Opportunity Center; Cancer Resource Center; Family and Children’s Services of Ithaca; Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce, as well as national organizations such as Planned Parenthood and National Organization of Women and the National Women’s Hall of Fame.

Very recently FLWBA has explored collaboration with the New York State Bar Association. In May 2016, we partnered with NYSBA Young Lawyer’s Section for its Trial Academy held on the Cornell Campus by hosting a welcome reception and having members volunteer as adjudication faculty. In 2017 FLWBA co-sponsored the welcome reception for the NYSBA Criminal Law Section’s Annual Meeting at Seneca Falls, and, along with the Tompkins County Bar Association, we supported the NYSBA Law Day at Cornell Campus, a program that introduces area high school students to careers in law.

Education:

We educate members through lunch seminars and continuing legal education programs. The FLWBA Wine Law CLE has become our signature accredited CLE event, combining education and wine tasting for the past four years, thanks to Deborah Wolf Miller, Leslie Danks Burke, and this year, Margaret Fowler. We have drawn attendees from across the region and from other WBASNY Chapters throughout the State. Presenters have included local and out of area practitioners, Cornell Faculty, and there are regular appearances by counsel from the New York State Liquor Authority. Other recent CLEs have included “Embryos on Ice” (Surrogacy & Posthumously Conceived Children) and Women and Minority Owned Businesses. In addition, 4 5 times a year our member meetings include presentations from practicing attorneys, Judges, Cornell Faculty, and Community Leaders on legal or other topics of interest, such as Collaborative Law, Environmental Issues, Immigration Law, and Women in the Judiciary.

Administration of justice:

Individually, our members log endless pro bono hours, and our leadership has been a role model in this regard. Notably, Sujata Gibson, while FLWBA president, organized and personally handled the defense of “We Are Seneca Lake” members protesting the expansion of gas storage in salt mines. Sujata also focused attention on the need for a more diverse judiciary, welcoming Justice Elizabeth Gary to an informal roundtable on steps attorneys can take if they want to become a Judge. FLWBA successfully nominated Diane Withiam and Andrea Mooney, winners of WBASNY’s Stephanie E. Kupferman Juvenile Justice award. FLWBA has explored partnerships to establish more formal pro-bono clinic activity to provide legal services to women in the community and is thrilled at the addition of Michaela Azemi to the FLWBA Executive Committee as Vice President, anticipating that in her role as Regional Pro Bono Coordinator for Legal Assistance of Western New York, Inc. (LAWNY), she will lead the chapter to advance such initiatives.

Inform and disseminate:

FLWBA is a regular communicator on matters of importance and relevance to its member through their inboxes, the Finger Lakes Women’s Bar Association – FLWBA Facebook Page, managed by Deirdre Hay and Leslie Danks Burke, and our website, www.flwba.org, designed by Anna Smith. Check us out!

FUTURE:

With gratitude to all of our current and past leaders and members, and to the Hon. Elizabeth Gary and other members of the judiciary who have supported our chapter from its inception, we join in celebrating the past ten years. And we ponder the future. The 2017 By-Laws Amendment expanded the FLWBA Board of Directors from six members to eight and created a formal nominating committee to strengthen the pipeline of future leaders. From its home base in Ithaca, FLWBA has drawn both leaders and members from Broome County (the only Central or Southern Tier NY County not formally connected to a WBASNY Chapter,) but as with so many professional associations, member numbers are static or falling. We hope that trend will turn as we endeavor to grow both within Tompkins County and throughout the surrounding Counties of FLWBA’s footprint. We also hope that as FLWBA members move into leadership at the State Level, the mother chapter’s embrace will be wide enough that they will never stray too far from home.

The future is all of us: our individual commitments and our personal connections can strengthen the Finger Lakes Women’s Bar Association, build on its past successes, and allow the Chapter to thrive in its next decade.

Ithaca, New York

Alyssa M. Barreiro (President 2016-2017)

Deirdre Hay (Founder, President 2013-14)