

# First 150 Gala a Success

"WE HAVE WATCHED AS OUR DAUGHTERS' LIVES GREW RICHER THROUGH THE INCREASING OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED THEM. AND WE HAVE SEEN OUR SONS BECOME BETTER MEN, AND OUR SOCIETY BECOME MORE PRODUCTIVE, AS THE TREMENDOUS POTENTIAL OF OUR WOMEN HAS BEEN TAPPED FOR THE BENEFIT OF US ALL. NONE OF THIS WOULD HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT THESE PIONEERING WOMEN WE HONOR TONIGHT. THEY FOUGHT THE GOOD FIGHT, AND WE ARE THEIR BENEFICIARIES."

—Justice Peggy Quince and Justice Barbara Pariente

In a room filled with roses, laughter and hugs, a tribute was paid to Florida's first women lawyers. Over 900 people attended the May 25, 2000 celebration honoring Florida's First 150 Women Lawyers and First Five African-American Women Lawyers.

The dais was "one we always dreamed of," according to Florida Bar President Edith Osman. Chief Justice Major B. Harding was flanked by women: Jeanmarie Whalen, FAWL President; Evett Simmons, President-elect of the National Bar Association; Edith Osman; Federal Judge Rosemary Barkett; Supreme Court Justices Peggy Quince and Barbara Pariente; Martha Barnett, current president of the American Bar Association; Wendy Loquasto, Chair of the First 150 Research Committee; and Florida's own Janet Reno, United States Attorney General.

Janet Reno personally knew at least four of the honorees and shared some great memories. Reno recalled as a seven-year-old telling her mother, "Yes, I can become a lawyer because Dixie Chastain is a lawyer." In fact, the first case Reno ever prosecuted was before Judge Chastain. Janet Reno commented that, "Judge Mattie Belle Davis showed me how to do it right... Reba Daner was so wonderful and would come up and touch me on the elbow and say, 'You are doing good and your mother would be proud of you.'" About Arthenia Joyner, Janet Reno said, "(She) was my ally when I went to the plate one day and questioned the



## HONORING Florida's First 150 Women Lawyers



adversity of a certain counsel."

"I had a dream" was the theme Florida Bar President Edith Osman chose to describe her idea to launch this massive project, as a joint effort with FAWL.

The "dream" continued on June 14, 2000, when the Florida Supreme Court held its own tribute.

Keynote Speaker Rosemary Barkett shared her views: "Each of the 150 women celebrated today is a wonderful story and each merits constant retelling... merits our admiration and our gratitude... for forcing the reality of this country to align itself a bit more with its ideals of equality and justice." Barkett cautioned, however, that while progress has been made, much still needed to be done. "We are still evolving into the society we idealistically have always talked of becoming—one of equal treatment and justice for all," Barkett said. "And one of the greatest impediments to that goal is permitting ourselves the luxury of believing that we have achieved it." ■



*"The day that there will be a real celebration is the day it won't be an issue that a woman did something, but it will be an issue that it was done."*

—Martha Barnett

*"Arriving at this place has not always been easy. However... I never wavered from the belief of the need for aggressive advocacy and public education to rid the nation of all remnants of discrimination... the belief that I, an African-American female... was uniquely qualified to work within the legal system to effectuate change."*

—Arthenia Joyner



Dixie L. Herlong Chastain (1930); Grace Williams Burwell (1935); Reba Engler Daner (1936); Daisy Richards Bisz (1937); Lois Ellen Thacker Graessle (1941); Ethel Dorothea Clarson Watson (1942); Ruby Burrows McZier (1965); C. Bette Wimbish (1968); Arthenia Joyner (1969); Judge Mattie Belle Davis (1936).



*"These are women who literally suffered scorn and indignities as they ended the centuries-old tradition that only men could practice law. Their stories are marked by bravery and perseverance of the first order."*

—Chief Justice Major Harding

**First Women Lawyers Committee:**

Edith Osman, Wendy Loquasto, Nina Ashenafi, Mary Ellen Clark, Beth Demme, Mary Jo Francis, Judge Gill S. Freeman, Amy E. Furness, Katherine A. Giddings, Sheila M. Gonzales, Rosana E. Hernandez, Allison Doliner Hockman, Lori J. Ketchledge, Judge Shelly J. Kravits, Kathy J. Maus, Rebecca J. Mercier, Kelly A. O'Keefe, Pamela I. Perry, Michelle A. Pivar, Adrienne F. Promoff, Janeen L. Rivers, Lida Rodriguez-Taseff, K. Renee Schimkat, Jacqueline Hogan Scala, Christi H. Sherouse, Lea Souza-Rasile, Lori K. Weems, and Jodi L. Wilkof.



*"We're not really women lawyers. We're lawyers who happen to be women."*

—Lois Ellen Thacker Graessle



## Believe it or not...

- ▶ ...in 1985, when Rosemary Barkett was sworn in as a Florida Supreme Court Justice, the restrooms at the Supreme Court were still labeled "Women" and "Attorneys"...
- ▶ ...in 1970's when Judge Maria Korvick was a prosecutor and pregnant, defense attorneys sought continuances on the basis that she would elicit too much sympathy from the jury based on her condition...
- ▶ ...women admitted to practice law before 1920 could not vote to change the laws they were sworn to uphold...
- ▶ ...women admitted to practice law before 1925 were prohibited by law from attending a public school in Florida...
- ▶ ...ALL the first 150 were admitted at a time when they were not legally guaranteed the right to own property in their own names AND all of them would have made closing arguments before juries composed solely of men.



A book commemorating the First 150 Women Lawyers Celebrations has been published and is now available for purchase. The book, published courtesy of LEXIS Publishing, includes biographies of the first 154 women admitted to practice law between 1898 and 1943 and Florida's first five African-American women lawyers admitted to the Bar. The book totals 176 pages and is filled with photographs and articles.

*"Although the playing field appears more level at the entry point into the profession, the lag comes later with respect to partnership and firm management."*

—Jeanmarie Whalen

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