



President's Message

by Susan W. Fox



"I am humbled by the greatness of FAWL's Golden Star Recipients—and equally impressed with the emerging leaders in FAWL's current ranks."

Setting FAWL's 2001-2002 Agenda

I was honored to be sworn in as President during the 50th Anniversary luncheon. As FAWL President-elect in 2000-2001, I had the privilege of planning the 50th Anniversary celebration. It was a peak experience for me and probably for all who attended. **Justice Abella** of the Ontario Court of Appeal was our keynote speaker. It is fair to say that she delivered one of the most touching and insightful messages in the history of bar association luncheons. If you missed it, a copy is available on FAWL's website, www.fawl.com.

I was humbled by the greatness of FAWL's Golden Star Recipients and Past Presidents, most of whom were present at the 50th Anniversary. I was and continue to be equally impressed with the emerging leaders in FAWL's current ranks. I only hope I can bear the standard as well as they have and will.

Pfizer's presentation on Women's Health and the seminar "We've Come a Long Way" rounded out the day's activities. These were events that truly benefitted the members who attended and reflected the outstanding quality of education FAWL provides to its members.

My first official act as President was to sign a contract with **Pat Stephens**, formerly Voluntary Bar Liaison for the Florida Bar, as our new Executive Director. Although we were sad to bid farewell to **Carolyn Pardue**, who served us well and remains a good friend, we are sincerely excited about the opportunity to work with an experienced bar executive.

FAWL's annual retreat, held August 18-19, 2001 in Sarasota in conjunction with the Voluntary Bar Leaders' Conference, was attended by about thirty members, representing about thirteen of FAWL's chapters.

Initiatives agreed upon for the year

fall into three basic categories: substantive issues; administrative (matters that affect FAWL's inner workings and the quality of service to members); and programs.

FAWL's Board identified two substantive issues to be addressed in 2001-2002:

The first substantive issue is equality of women judges, which will be addressed by a committee chaired by **Sherri Johnson** of Sarasota. The committee will examine: equal assignment among court divisions; representation by women lawyers in nominating committees under the new appointment process enacted by the Legislature; gender disparities on the district courts of appeal; and whether women judges are unfairly subjected to disciplinary proceedings.

The second substantive issue relates to a recent ethics opinion by the Supreme Court Ethics Advisory Committee stating judges cannot belong to bar associations that endorse candidates for judicial seats. FAWL's By-Laws allow the appointment of an Endorsement Committee for endorsing candidates for public office. However, FAWL has neither appointed an Endorsement Committee nor endorsed candidates for public office within at least the past three years. At the retreat, FAWL adopted a resolution suspending all endorsements so long as the advisory opinion remains in effect. FAWL wanted to reassure its members in the judiciary and candidates for judicial positions that their membership has not and will not result in ethical violations. FAWL also initiated a change in By-Laws to clarify that neither it nor local chapters will endorse judicial candidates. FAWL notified its local chapters of the opinion, and strongly recommended that they likewise adopt the same actions. FAWL is investigating whether any options are available to challenge or seek clarification of the advisory opinion.

Programs for the year will include a continuation of our 50th Anniversary Year celebration at the mid-year meeting, with additional Golden Star awards, and unveiling of the 50 Year History Book. Also at the mid-year meeting in Miami, a CLE seminar will be held on "Litigating for Change" featuring the role of lawyers in effectuating social justice. A legislative reception will be held in Tallahassee in March. FAWL is planning to broaden its seminars to include the annual meeting as well as regional seminars, as a way of improving member service and showcasing women as lecturers on substantive law issues.

In the administrative category, FAWL will: increase revenues to end the year with a \$10,000 working capital reserve; increase membership and start or re-start chapters in areas that do not have active organizations; develop free member benefits; offer cooperative child care during meetings; upgrade the website to allow registration and payment by credit card; and improve the database accuracy. FAWL will develop a business plan with non-dues sources of revenues, sustaining membership opportunities, and better recruitment of sponsors and advertisers. We plan to initiate better communication with chapters and have the executive director follow up individually with members who let their dues lapse. Maintaining the high quality of the *Journal* remains a top priority.

As this publication goes to press, we have yet to put all these plans into action. Based on the experience of our trail blazers, however, we can rest assured that many of these plans will come to fruition and that FAWL will continue to be a strong, growing organization in the 21st century. ■

E-mail Susan at swf@macfar.com.