

The Birth of Local Chapters

FAWL Blossoms Throughout the State



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Several of the FAWL Local Chapters have been holding 20th anniversary celebrations. In fact, the Hillsborough Association for Women Lawyers (HAWL) hosted a gala 20th anniversary celebration on October 24, 2002. My own chapter, Tallahassee Women Lawyers, will be 23 this June and we're already planning for the upcoming 25th in 2005.

It is no coincidence that chapters are celebrating 20-something anniversaries now. Although the idea of establishing local women's bar associations bubbled up from time to time during the first 28 years of FAWL, it was not until March 1980 that FAWL's Bylaws were amended by adding a "Local Chapters" section to the "Membership" article as follows:

Members residing in a given county or other regional area shall be encouraged to form a chapter of FAWL. Upon application of five (5) or more members, and provided the chapter shall adopt the Bylaws of the Association, the Board of Directors may issue a charter to the local chapter.

Considering the times, the birth of Local Chapters is really no surprise. Statistics gathered by Past President **Edith Osman** (1989-90) show that there were only 175 women lawyers in the entire state in 1966, and that there were only 684 women lawyers in 1975! With so few women lawyers, the idea of a statewide organization, rather than small

local associations, made sense. The late-1970s, however, saw the effect of the women's movement and women finally accounted for ten percent of the entering classes in law schools! The legal environment was not particularly friendly to women, however, and steep inequities existed for women in legal profession. Thus, with women increasing in numbers, yet facing many gender bias issues, the birth of Local Chapters can be more easily understood as a type of grassroots movement.

As explained by Past President **Irene Redstone** (1978-80), the time was ripe for the birth of Local Chapters and the push toward positions of power:

Because of the small number of women lawyers attending the Annual Meeting, held in conjunction with The Florida Bar annual convention [in June 1978], it appeared that women could not afford either the time or money, or both, to make the trip to meetings. It was common knowledge that the majority of women lawyers were being paid about 50% of men lawyers, although doing the same amount and quality of work. It seemed only common sense to have smaller meetings close to home, where only one day was required and very little expense, but would offer an opportunity for networking among women lawyers. There was a need for helping qualified women to be elected or appointed as judges and in policy-making posts, so the Bylaws were [also] amended to provide a procedure for FAWL to endorse and support qualified women.

Regional areas were quick to respond

to the Bylaws amendment for Local Chapters. The Dade County Chapter of FAWL, which had been meeting as an informal association for lunch for many years, held its initial organizational meeting on May 27, 1980, and permanent officers were elected at a dinner on June 24, 1980. Past President **Delphine Strickland** (1968-69) was instrumental in formally organizing Tallahassee Women Lawyers in June 1980. **Dianne Jay Weaver** had been elected President of the Broward County Chapter and she reported an average of 40 to 50 women lawyers at luncheon meetings in 1980. The Orlando Chapter, now C-FAWL, was also formed in 1980 in immediate response to the Bylaws amendment. The Volusia County Chapter was admitted to FAWL in 1981 and Hillsborough, Nova Law Center, Palm Beach County, and the Tenth Judicial Circuit Chapters were represented on the 1982-83 FAWL Board of Directors.

Today, FAWL has 21 chapters: Brevard County, Broward County, Clara Gehan (8th Judicial Circuit), C-FAWL, Collier County, HAWL, Jacksonville, Lee County, Manatee County, Marion County, Miami-Dade, Northwest (Pensacola), Nova Southeastern University, Palm Beach County, Pinellas County, Sarasota County, St. Thomas University, Tallahassee, Treasure Coast, and Volusia/Flagler. And we will soon be 22 chapters when we welcome back the Keys in the newly reformed Monroe County Chapter.

The growth and success of the Local Chapters is part of a wonderful legacy for FAWL. Gone are the days when a woman lawyer might be the only female at a local bar meeting. Today, women lawyers network with other women in their Local Chapters, and then they introduce women to the "establishment" bar associations in their areas, thereby

increasing their network of contacts to all areas in their community's legal profession. Gone are the days when the only available mentors were open-minded male lawyers. Women can now easily find women mentors in their Local Chapters, both in the practice of law and in the balancing of their professional and family lives. Gone, too, are the days when women's bar activities were limited to the annual and mid-year Florida Bar conventions. Local Chapters have exploded with activities and opportunities over the years, with the result that women have to actually pick and choose which programs they will be involved in. By climbing the ladder in their Local Chapters, women are also attaining positions of power in The Florida Bar governance, independent of FAWL's nonvoting seat on the Board of Governors.

Today, most FAWL members only experience FAWL through their Local Chapters. From my own personal experience, I know that only a handful of TWL members attend the quarterly FAWL Board Meetings or the FAWL Retreat. This fact begs the question: Has FAWL been surpassed by its Local Chapters? Even more inevitable is the question, "Do Local Chapters still need FAWL?" I believe the answer to the first question is "no," because FAWL has a statewide importance that no Local Chapter can hope to attain, and the answer to the second question is "yes," because FAWL provides a statewide voice for women lawyers.

These are not new questions for FAWL. Ten years ago, when **Mary V. Brennan** was President of FAWL, she answered the same questions I have answered today. In her FAWL President's Message, she wrote:

WHY ME?

Occasionally a member will tell me it's terrific that somebody (FAWL) is doing all of this work [for example, supporting women judges and justices, filing amicus briefs in cases concerning women, representing women in The Florida Bar, empowering women through

nonstop efforts to help qualified members get elected or appointed to various offices, and lobbying in the Florida Legislature], but can't it be done without her involvement? Suppose FAWL takes a position she doesn't like or another Chapter supports a local candidate in their area whom she would not have supported, or suppose she doesn't want to support any issues or candidates at all.

The answers to those questions really depend on whether you believe that our voices are more powerful in unison than individually. There are a number of FAWL Chapters around the state that are large enough, active enough, and powerful enough to further their agendas individually without the necessity of joining with other FAWL groups in other areas. And Florida is big enough, with a sufficiently diverse population, to include women lawyers who have differing philosophies on which issues should be important to—and even the need for the existence of—women's bar groups.

For over 40 years, FAWL has kept those (occasionally) disparate voices together, all working toward the day when there would not in fact be a need for its existence. Its philosophy and activities have evolved through wildly differing political climates which gave rise to wildly differing attitudes toward women and toward lawyers: from the Eisenhower years and June Cleaver, through Beatniks, Twiggy, the Summer of Love, disco, Billy Carter, Reaganomics, L.A. Law and now (yes!) Hillary Clinton here to help with our health care. I, for one, think we're winning, and that we'll all keep pulling on the same end of the rope.

With the publication of *The Unfinished*

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—MARY BRENNAN

Agenda: Women and the Legal Profession by the American Bar Association Commission on Women in the Profession in the summer of 2001, we learned that women had increased in numbers as law partners, general counsels, and federal judges, but they remain under-represented in positions of greatest status, influence, and economic reward, and they still earn on average \$20,000 less than their male counterparts. Thus, it is apparent that gender bias, while less obviously intentional now, continues to exist by creating barriers for women through unconscious stereotypes, inadequate access to support networks, inflexible workplace structures, sexual harassment, and bias in the justice system.

It was FAWL that used its statewide voice in the Florida Supreme Court Gender Bias Study Commission and Gender Bias Study Implementation Commission in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and it is apparent from the comments made by the Chapter Representatives at the FAWL Retreat in August 2002 that the Local Chapters continue to depend upon FAWL to be their statewide and national voice on women's issues. So, as your Local Chapter celebrates its anniversary this year, consider as part of that celebration FAWL's role in its birth and FAWL's statewide voice, which continues to speak for women lawyers throughout the state. ■

ADDENDUM FROM THE FAWL OFFICE: FORMING A CHAPTER

Members residing in a given county or other regional area shall be encouraged to form a chapter of the association. Upon application of five members and provided the chapter shall submit By-Laws consistent with the Articles of Incorporation and By-Laws of the Association, the Board of Directors may issue a charter to the local chapter. For additional information contact the FAWL office at 850/894-0055 or e-mail fawl@fawl.org. ■