



The WAAT Newsletter

The Quarterly Newsletter
of the Women Attorneys Association of Topeka

WAAT celebrates silver anniversary in style

By Teresa Watson

With laughter and tears, fondness and fanfare, members and friends of the Women Attorneys Association of Topeka celebrated the 25th anniversary of its founding. Guests enjoyed the music of a string quartet, champagne and cake as well as the company of colleagues in the atrium of the Kansas Historical Society.

Cathy Reeder, a charter member and the first president of WAAT, and the Hon. Marla Luckert, also a charter member and the fifth president of WAAT, welcomed guests and provided some historical perspective on the genesis of the group while warming up the crowd for remarks by the Hon. Deanell Reece Tacha and the Hon. Mary Beck Briscoe.

Barb Rankin, a charter member of WAAT, recognized each of the charter members by name, many of whom were in attendance.

A group photo was taken to commemorate the evening. The next day, on Friday, October 23, a group of women attorneys planted a tree on the northeast corner of the Kansas Judicial Center with a small plaque to mark the occasion and serve as a re-



The Hon. Deanell Reece Tacha (above) and the Hon. Mary Beck Briscoe served as keynote speakers at the celebration.

minder of the association's roots as well as its capacity to grow and thrive.

Barb Rankin led a committee of dedicated volunteers who made the

25th anniversary celebration an event to remember.

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Members in good spirits for holiday party at Ice & Olives

By Laurel Klein Searles

Since the inception of WAAT, members join each year for a holiday party. This event provides members with the opportunity to celebrate the holidays with each other at a purely social event. The annual tradition continued this year with a celebration at Ice & Olives in Topeka on December 1. More than twenty-five members attended the party.

At the event, the group enjoyed a wine and cheese tasting. Barry Busch, owner of Ice & Olives, provided four different pairings of wine and cheese. Eryn Wright, WAAT Social Chair, ap-

preciated the wine and cheese tasting: "I learned a lot about the different wines and cheeses we tasted, really more than I expected to."

The wine and cheese tasting was followed by a white elephant gift exchange. Each member that brought a gift to the event was able to choose between unwrapping an unopened gift and "stealing" a gift that had already been opened. Members took home some fantastic gifts including, jewelry, candles, a bamboo cutting board, a Christmas serving platter, arts & crafts supplies, a ceramic basket, and many other great gifts.



Cynthia Waskowiak enjoys a glass of red wine at WAAT's annual holiday party. Members sampled four pairings of different wines and cheeses.

From the President



**Jennifer
Sherber**

Greetings and welcome back to our newly re-established newsletter! After a hiatus, the newsletter returns, and is but one of a number of enhancements that WAAT has in store for our membership.

It has been my privilege to serve as President during WAAT's 25th anniversary year during which time we've seen a revitalization of the organization including increased attendance at the monthly meetings, the introduction of monthly Meet & Greet's (at the Kansan Grill) and the resurgence of the newsletter.

We have a talented and dedicated Board of Directors who has worked hard to implement the findings of a recent survey. As a result, the Board has planned Meet & Greet's, moved the location of the general membership meetings, added more CLE opportunities at our monthly luncheons and provided speakers to present on topics requested by members.

This spring, the Board has planned many exciting events. The Chief Justice Kay McFarland Award will be presented on February 24th at the Kansas Law Center. At our April General Membership meeting, we will hold our first ever Founders Lunch. Also in April, we will host the annual Just Desserts event, which funds a scholarship given by the Washburn Women's Alliance.

We welcome and encourage ideas for improvements. If you have questions about events or meetings, visit our website at, topekawomenattorneys.com. If you have suggestions or ideas, contact me at jennifersherber@yahoo.com. I thank each of you for making WAAT the organization that it is today.

Member profile

Rankin strikes a balance between career and family

**By Brandi Studer
and Amanda Vogelsberg**

Barbara Rankin will be the first to admit that her successful legal career has not come without sacrifice and alternative thinking. Barb grew up in Wellsville, Kansas and attended college at Ottawa University. She graduated from Washburn University School of Law in 1982. While attending Washburn, she met husband-to-be Jim Rankin, a 1975 graduate of Washburn Law School, who was practicing in Topeka. Barb's first job after completing law school was as a law clerk for Kansas Supreme Court Chief Justice Alfred G. Schroeder.

While she was clerking, a close friend from law school, Cathy Reeder, suggested the possibility of organizing a networking association for women attorneys. They acquired a list of every attorney in Shawnee County and invited all women on that list to a meeting to determine if there was enough interest in starting a formal organization of women attorneys. The meeting was held in November 1983 at Robby's Restaurant, which was on the top floor of what is now the CoreFirst Bank building at 9th and Kansas, and about twenty five women attended.

At the meeting, many attendees

were supportive of starting an organization that could both promote camaraderie and networking among women in the bar, as well as advocate involvement in existing bar associations. Some attendees questioned whether women needed to start their own "bar association" and expressed concerns about whether a separate organization would be seen as competing with the established bar associations. One attendee, Christel Marquardt (now Court of Appeals Judge Marquardt), advocated that if the organization was formed, it should be done in such a way that it would be meaningful to its members and have credibility within the legal community, which included charging membership dues.

Following that meeting, Cathy, Barb and a group of other dedicated early supporters, including Lori Callahan, Marty Snyder, Jill Michaux, Kathryn Gardner, Carol Green and Martha Hodgesmith, formed a steering committee. They researched women attorney organizations in other states and spent many meetings brainstorming the structure and purpose of what was to become the Women Attorneys Association of Topeka, Inc.

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Barb Rankin (left) and fellow WAAT member Cathy Reeder enjoy lunch at the Kansas Women Attorney's Association's annual conference in Lindsborg in July.

**Member profile: Barb Rankin
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In August 1984, the bylaws were adopted and beginning in September of that year WAAT began meeting monthly for lunch at the YWCA, and the first officers were elected. Cathy served as the first president of WAAT in 1984-85 and Barb served as president in 1985-86. Barb feels fortunate to have been involved at the beginning of WAAT and is grateful to the many women who have worked to continue the work of the organization and helped it to adapt to the evolving needs of women in the profession. When describing the early days of the organization, Barb likes to quote Cathy Reeder who recalled, "We were the spark that ignited the fire, but the tinder of interest was already there." Barb enjoyed reuniting with some of the other early leaders of WAAT and getting to know some of the current members when working with the committee that organized the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration for WAAT.

After clerking, Barb worked at Security Benefit Group in Topeka where she worked with the company's mutual funds. Barb moved to Wichita in 1987 when her husband joined the Foulston & Siefkin law firm there. Shortly after their move, Barb had her

first son and took a job with Fourth Financial Corporation in its legal department. After three years, this busy working mom realized she wanted to have more time at home with her son, so proposed a four day "alternative work week" to her employer.

Although her boss and the HR department were reluctant to consider this because it just wasn't "done" at that time with officer-level employees, Barb was not deterred; she researched what other companies had done and continued to advocate for a four-day work week. After about six months, a senior executive with whom Barb worked closely recognized that companies needed to be flexible

with mothers in the work force or they would face losing those experienced employees. Shortly after he took up her cause with the HR department, her request was granted. Many other women executives at Fourth Financial were later able to negotiate flexible work schedules due to Barb's perseverance.

In 1992, Foulston & Siefkin opened a branch office in Topeka and Barb and her husband moved back. After having a second son, she took a job at a small bank as their legal counsel. Despite only working part-time, Barb decided it would be less stressful for her and her family if she could be a full-time mom to her then 8 and 3 year old sons. Thus began what ended up as an eight-year sabbatical from the legal profession. During that time she became involved with the Junior League, her children's schools, served on several boards and political committees, and participated in Leadership Topeka.

In 2004, Barb returned to the workforce as Director of the Legal Department for the Kansas Banker's Association. The job involved many weeks of travel during the year and Barb soon realized she had gone back to work full-time too soon. Shortly after leaving the association in hopes of finding a part-time job, a

former colleague from Fourth Financial Corporation offered her a position as general counsel for the CrossFirst banking organization in Overland Park, Kansas. Although originally a part-time employee, she now works full-time but travels only two days a week to the office in Overland Park. Thanks to e-mail, cell phones and other technology not available twenty years ago, she is able to work from



Barb Rankin (right) raises her glass along with the Hon. Deaneell Reece Tacha (center) and the Hon. Mary Beck Briscoe (left) to celebrate WAAT's 25th anniversary.

home the remainder of the time. "If I wasn't able to work from home the majority of the time, I wouldn't have taken this position. I'm very fortunate to work with flexible and progressive-minded people," she said.

One of Barb's sons is a senior at Creighton University and is applying to law schools. Her other son is a junior in high school. Barb does not regret putting her career on hold for the eight years she spent as a full-time mom during their grade school and middle school years, but does know it had a professional downside in that she wasn't able to network with people in the legal community and did not keep up with groups like WAAT. "It was easier to completely go off the 'grid' rather than have to explain all the time that I was a 'stay-at-home mom.' It doesn't go over well in professional settings." Plus she was fortunate that her lawyer husband could keep her updated on the Topeka legal landscape. In the end, it worked out for her and she feels she has a job now that provides her the balance she wants.

She says of her career that she was always fortunate to be in the right place at the right time. However, Barb's innovative spirit certainly played a role in her success throughout her legal career.

"I'm very fortunate to work with flexible and progressive-minded people."

— Barb Rankin on her position as general counsel for the CrossFirst banking organization

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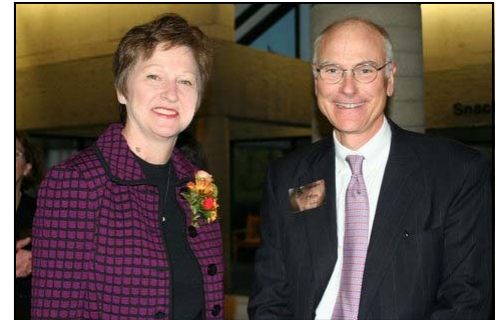
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Silver Anniversary (continued from page 1)

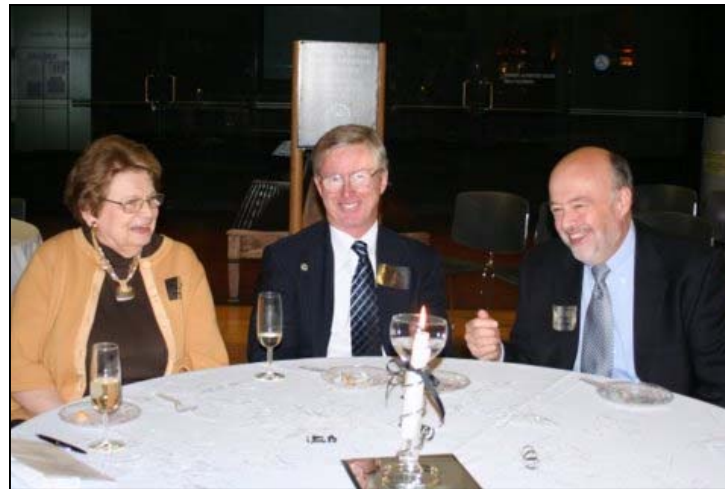
The other committee members are: Janie Kelly Coates, Mary Feighny, Carol Foreman, Martha Hodgesmith, Derenda Mitchell, Lisa Montgomery, Rita Noll, Patti Petersen-Klein, Cathy Reeder, Becky Sanders, Jennifer Sherber, Marty Snyder, Melissa Wangemann and Hon. Evelyn Wilson.



Newsletter Committee Members

Brooke Hesler
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Brandi Studer
Amanda Vogelsberg
Teresa Watson

If you're interested in serving on the Newsletter Committee, please contact Brooke Hesler at brooke.hesler@gmail.com



Upcoming Events:

General Membership Meeting

January 27, 2010
Speaker: Prof. Amy Westbrook
Location: Washburn Law School, Room 120

Meet & Greet

January 28, 2010
Mingle with other WAAT members.
Location: The Kansan Grill, 703 S. Kansas Ave.

Board Meeting

February 17, 2010
Location: Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library

General Membership Meeting

February 24, 2010
Please join us for the presentation of the Chief Justice Kay McFarland Award.
Location: Kansas Law Center (KBA building)

Meet & Greet

February 25, 2010
Mingle with other WAAT members.
Location: The Kansan Grill, 703 S. Kansas Ave.

For more information about upcoming WAAT events, please visit our website, www.topekawomenattorneys.com.