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GRAWA PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Breakfast with Chief Judge Judith S. Kaye

By **HEIDI SCHULT GREGORY**
Daily Record Columnist

On Friday, July 20, GRAWA proudly hosted the Hon. Judith S. Kaye for breakfast at the Woodcliff Lodge.

More than 60 GRAWA members and supporters were in attendance — all eager to shake hands with, and hear from, the longest serving Chief Judge of the State of New York.

In her typical style, Chief Judge Kaye greeted people one by one, welcoming those she knew and introducing herself to those she did not. She is remarkable that way — you meet her and instantly feel as though you have known her for years.

On approach, she is kind, witty and insightful. She is the perfect blend of compassion, fortitude and intelligence. Chief Judge Kaye is most certainly a people person, and perhaps the legal profession's biggest cheerleader.

The Chief Judge is a true role model — not just for women attorneys, but for all attorneys throughout the state and nation. Born in 1938, Chief Judge Kaye is very much in touch with the demands facing today's lawyers, including struggles with work/life balance, gender/pay inequity and the need to restore public trust and confidence in the profession.

She graciously shared “Herstory” with GRAWA — giving us the opportunity to know her on a more personal level. Her humble upbringings in Monticello, N.Y., and her eventual successes at Barnard College and in law school helped to mold Chief Judge Kaye into the amazing woman she is today. In 1962, she graduated *cum laude* from New York University School of Law, and was one of only 10 females in a graduating class of about 300. She was admitted to the New York State Bar in 1963.

By all accounts, Chief Judge Kaye was a trailblazer — she changed jobs to suit her family's needs, worked part-time before alternate work schedules were accepted options in the legal profession, yet ultimately achieved partner status. Her first legal job was with Sullivan & Cromwell, a large Manhattan firm, as an associate. It was there she met the late Stephen Rackow Kaye, whom she married in 1964.



After leaving Sullivan & Cromwell, Chief Judge Kaye worked in the legal department at IBM for about one year. Through the course of the next few years, while giving birth to and caring for three children, Chief Judge Kaye served as a part-time assistant to the dean at her *alma mater*, NYU Law. In 1969, she joined the law firm of Olwine, Connelly, Chase, O'Donnell & Weyher as a part-time associate. Less than six years later, she was named the firm's first female partner.

Chief Judge Kaye remained in private practice until 1983, when Gov. Mario Cuomo appointed her as the first female associate judge of the Court of Appeals. In 1993, she was appointed by Cuomo to the state judiciary's highest office, becoming the first woman Chief Judge. She has steadfastly held the position for the past 15 years, serving the position and the state well while working tirelessly to improve the justice system.

Later this year, she must step down because of an arcane law requiring retirement at age 70. The Chief Judge, who approaches retirement with some trepidation, describes herself as “liminal” — being in-between or in a transitional state — but ready to tackle the next phase of life. As the Chief Judge Kaye prepares to retire, lawyers all across the state and the country will take time to honor her greatness and celebrate her numerous accomplishments.

On behalf of GRAWA, I want to take this opportunity to give a very public “thank you” to Chief Judge Kaye. GRAWA was fortunate to enjoy quality time, albeit short, with her. She truly is a remarkable woman who has offered so much of her professional life to public service and the advancement of women in the profession. GRAWA is now, and forever will be, grateful for her service, her leadership and her being an incredible role model to so many young female lawyers.

GRAWA also extends a very big “thank you” to the Hon. Thomas VanStrydonck and his hardworking committee for efforts in bringing Chief Judge Kaye to the Rochester area.

Heidi Schult Gregory is a member of the law firm, Harris Beach PLLC. She serves on the Health Care Providers Industry Team as well as the Business & Commercial Litigation Practice Group. She is GRAWA's 26th president.