

# THE DAILY RECORD

WESTERN NEW YORK'S SOURCE FOR LAW, REAL ESTATE, FINANCE AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE SINCE 1908

## GRAWA PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### Kicking off the new GRAWA year

By **HEIDI SCHULT GREGORY**  
Daily Record Columnist

The Greater Rochester Association for Women Attorneys (GRAWA) held its Annual Installation Dinner May 20 at the Gatherings in Penfield and the following is adapted from my Installation Dinner remarks.

I am truly honored to be GRAWA's 26th president. I am ready for the task! Being the president of such an incredible organization may not always be easy (especially in this upcoming politically charged year), but for me it will be a way to give back.

I credit GRAWA for helping define my identity as a lawyer and for helping me to develop some much needed confidence. I moved to Rochester about 12 years ago after marrying my law school sweetheart. While I was a member of GRAWA for many years, I did not become an active member until 2001.

I was invited to participate on a committee for the Family Friendly Employer Award. I met regularly with a small group of women attorneys to discuss the award and our group enjoyed "meeting" so much that we resurrected GRAWA's Mom's Group — now the Family and Careers Committee.

Those monthly meetings helped me to put my life and my career in perspective, and provided more confidence as a professional. I learned from other women what I could not necessarily learn in the courtroom or in my office. It was not until I ventured out and got involved with that committee that I finally appreciated my capabilities — and our organization's capabilities.

I can't help but think that my experience was not all that different from our founding members almost three decades ago. GRAWA essentially began following a fruitful discussion between three local female attorneys. I assume they felt that same synergy or energy I felt when attending those award committee meetings seven years ago. They recognized the need to gather and they acted on it. GRAWA was formed not just for their individual benefits, but as a resource for the community's female attorneys.

In the last 26 years, GRAWA, like many organizations, has experienced growing pains, hit a few obstacles and may have stumbled along at times. Nonetheless, the organization is alive and well. And, until women attorneys have achieved true parity with their male counterparts, GRAWA will be needed in this community.

It is a vital organization. At its core, GRAWA works to promote, support and encourage women attorneys in the furtherance and development of their careers and to promote improvements and needed changes in the legal profession through our relationship

with the Women's Bar Association of the State of New York.

It will be my job to make sure GRAWA continues to positively effect the lives of female attorneys, especially those in the Greater Rochester area, and to be a support, a refuge, a network and an advocate in these challenging times. With the assistance of my "dream team" board of directors, GRAWA will continue to deliver quality programs and be responsive to the needs of its members and the community at large.

I am thrilled to be working shoulder to shoulder with so many quality women — this year's board together with the standing committee chairwomen represent a cross section from a variety of legal perspectives, ages and stages. We have but one common purpose — to ensure GRAWA's mission.

My vision for the year is simple: Continue to do what we do well, reevaluate what isn't working and develop new programs and new opportunities for our members. Here are a few sneak previews:

With the primary goal of supporting women in their careers, I hope to adopt Judge Patricia Marks's wonderful suggestion to implement a program allowing GRAWA to assist in the placement of its members on various community boards and committees. For those interested in giving back to the community and donating their professional time, such a program meets three goals — advance the individual attorney's career; establish a resource for the community at large and ensure qualified female candidates are placed on important community boards. Similar to other women's groups, GRAWA also would offer training and education to members who wished to learn more about community involvement and board opportunities. This program will be a big undertaking and will be addressed, at least initially, by GRAWA's Nominating Committee, under the capable leadership of the Hon. Gail Donofrio with the support of the Hon. Karen Morris.

I hope we can continue to breathe life into two relatively newly-formed committees, the Non-Traditional Attorneys Committee and the Attorneys in Transition Committee, both led by Laura Taylor. GRAWA appreciates and understands that many women choose a legal path that is not traditional. Laura's committees (while still in start-up mode) represent a need within our organization to provide a resource and an outlet for those who have blazed new and different paths, but are in need of professional networks and connections, or those who left the practice of law and now seek to re-enter the profession. We owe it to our fellow sisters in the law to reach out and provide assistance through mentoring and social networking opportunities.

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I would love to see the newly-formed Newly-Admitted Women Attorneys Committee grow and thrive. I am impressed with the four young women who developed the criteria for this new committee. Katie Courtney, Julie Bielecki, Leah Szmuch and Alison Bates were asked to participate on GRAWA's Law Day Committee and enjoyed their time together. During their Law Day meetings, they came up with the idea for this new committee, geared toward anyone admitted five years or less or aged 32 or younger. Their energy and enthusiasm are contagious. Like many of GRAWA's committees, they hope to provide necessary resources and networking opportunities to young members and to collaborate with other committees on matters affecting their generation.

I also look forward to continued collaboration with the Monroe County Bar Association and the Rochester Black Bar Association on various diversity programs and initiatives. Through the past few years, the at-large legal community has embraced diversity not only

as a concept, but also as a way of doing business. Still, there is more to be done. Working in collaboration with WBASNY and other associations, GRAWA hopes to be a leader in this area. In fact, I would love to see GRAWA host or co-sponsor at least one diversity program or presentation annually.

I want to encourage everyone to seize an opportunity and get involved in a GRAWA committee, program or project. Getting involved, being active and embracing new experiences will allow you to expand your personal and professional scope and to give back to the legal community and the community at large.

Thank you for your support of GRAWA and the incoming board of directors. Stay tuned in the year ahead: More good news will follow, I promise.

*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 and Commercial Litigation Practice Group. She is GRAWA's 26th president.*