

# GRAWA's unique committee focuses on family and careers

BY SARA STOUT ASHCRAFT  
*Daily Record Columnist*

The Greater Rochester Association for Women Attorneys offers the opportunity to participate in a group offered by few bar associations — the Family and Careers Committee.

This committee provides members with a network and emotional support, and serves to educate the legal community at large about the importance of maintaining balance between work and family.

The Family and Careers Committee appeals to a broad spectrum of members due to ever-increasing societal recognition that for, both women and men, a balance of career and family is essential.

Members of the committee are in different stages of life — from becoming new parents to having college-bound children, to those caught in the "sandwich generation" who are dealing with the needs of aging parents. Networking within the committee can provide basic how-to information for any of these situations. Additionally, members form a mutual support network to help develop action plans for such things as seeking part-time work tracks, re-entry to full-time work or taking medical leaves of absence. The committee takes its role of educating the legal community about family and work balance seriously. Past

projects include developing and conducting a survey of Rochester area legal employers on leave policies and alternative work arrangements. The survey fostered a conversation between employers and employees regarding the nature of the workplace in Rochester and our changing needs.

The survey lead to articles in *The Daily Record* and within the Women's Bar Association of the State of New York newsletter, and also helped GRAWA to share information and inspiration with other WBASNY chapters and the New York State Bar Association.

Moreover, the survey has formed the basis for other committee projects, including finding ways to provide examples of best practices and models for alternative work arrangements. (Such ideas can be found on the GRAWA Web site at [www.grawa.org](http://www.grawa.org).) Committee members also anticipate a future partnership with the NYSBA on related issues.

Working with the Monroe County Bar Association the GRAWA committee developed two well-received CLEs

on life balance issues, the culmination of three years' work by the committee. As Connor O'Brien, committee co-chair says the group is "like yeast for the legal community — our work bubbles through GRAWA and the MCBA and the legal community as a whole, generating other ideas and projects to keep our profession growing and current."

The committee raises awareness of family/career balance by recognizing legal employers that provide family-friendly workplaces. GRAWA and MCBA have joined together to present the bi-annual "Family Friendly Employer Award," and the committee, along with a MCBA liaison, collects, disseminates and evaluates the nominations.

In addition to major projects, the committee has held a number of smaller events for its members, including an annual picnic where members can put faces to the names of partners or spouses and see how much the kids have grown; a book dinner where members shared a meal and insights and a meeting with a life coach who shared techniques with

committee members. Plans are in the works to develop a spot for advice on life issues and answers to questions on the GRAWA Web site. The committee also is planning more brown bag seminars and welcomes new ideas or needs.

Connor O'Brien had this to say about the committee: "On a personal note, the Family and Careers Committee has been a perfect entry point for my involvement in GRAWA and thereafter, the MCBA. Through this committee, I have made contacts into friends and widened my perspective on our legal community. In my view, this committee provides a welcoming, pleasant, 'give what you can' way to share with others who in turn can pull you through."

If you are interested in joining GRAWA's Family and Careers Committee, contact one of the co-chairs: Connor O'Brien, phone (585) 613-4021, e-mail [Connor\\_O'Brien@nywd.uscourts.gov](mailto:Connor_O'Brien@nywd.uscourts.gov); or Kathy Schmidt, phone (585) 263-5706, e-mail [Kathleen.D.Schmitt@usdoj.gov](mailto:Kathleen.D.Schmitt@usdoj.gov). To learn more about GRAWA membership, contact Membership Chairwoman Sharon Higginbotham by phone at (585) 428-3817; or e-mail [shuggenb@courts.state.ny.us](mailto:shuggenb@courts.state.ny.us).

*Sara Stout Ashcraft is a partner in Ashcraft, Franklin & Young, LLP. She concentrates her practice in the areas of matrimonial and family law.*

## GRAWA PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



SARA STOUT ASHCRAFT