

## **Women Lawyers' Forum Report 2011-2012**

The Women Lawyers' Forum is the connecting point for women in the legal profession. Through the inter-lacing of the social and the professional, the Women Lawyers' Forum provides an opportunity for women in the law to meet, to talk and to get to know each other better, for personal and professional benefit. The Forum organizes several events each year where women can engage, relax and enjoy the company of other women who share the law as a common thread.

The Executive of the Women Lawyers' Forum met regularly to plan the year's calendar of events and discuss issues of importance to women in the practice of law. We worked hard to provide women lawyers' with opportunities to network while enjoying each others' company, and to provide information and practical advice regarding career planning and choices for women in the law.

An accomplishment that we are particularly proud of this year is the recommendation to, and adoption by, the MBA of a new award: The Isabel Ross Hunt Maclean Award. The award, which will be handed out annually at the MBA Mid-Winter Awards Luncheon, recognizes a female MBA member who has achieved professional excellence in her field, influenced other women to pursue legal careers, supported other women in career advancement or opened doors for women lawyers in a variety of job settings that historically were closed to them. The WLF nominated Madam Justice Freda Steel for the award, and she was the inaugural recipient of the award at the Awards Reception in January 2012. We also nominated Madam Justice Freda Steel, for the CBA Cecelia I. Johnstone Award, a national award with the same criteria, and are thrilled that she was the successful applicant this year. Justice Steel will be presented her award at the CBA Conferences Reception to be held in conjunction with the CBA Canadian Legal Conference in Vancouver on August 13, 2012.

In the furtherance of our goals, the WLF organized the following events this year:

### **Wine, Women & Song IV**

On October, 2011, we presented our fourth annual Wine, Women & Song event to an audience of some 40 lawyers and judges at The Academy. This event was chaired by Member-at-Large Kristin Gibson, and was hosted by Member-at-Large Colleen McDuff. It featured fantastic performances by The "Kat" Basarab Experience, Pamela Reilly and Emily Kaplan and Sasha Harvard. It is always a pleasure to showcase the musical talents of our members. A fun evening was had by all.

### **What Else Can I do with a Law Degree?**

We had one fall lunch session on December 5, 2011, which was well attended and received by our members. Moderated and organized by Member-at-Law Karen Dyck, a panel of three women lawyers talked about their experiences working in non-traditional legal roles. Joan Dawkins, Executive Director, Women's Health Clinic; Marilou McPhedran, Principal, Global College, University of Winnipeg and Donna Seale, Human Rights Lawyer, Educator and Workplace Investigator shared their experiences of leaving the practice of law to embark on alternative careers. Through a series of Q & As, the speakers candidly spoke about their experiences practising law in the traditional sense, as well as the process of change to their chosen careers. They described why they left the practice of law, the challenges and risks of leaving, and the benefits they realized in doing so.

## **Innovative Strategies for Effective Communication**

The WLF sponsored a CLE at the MBA Mid-Winter on January 19, 2012. Pat Lane, Member-at-Large, with the assistance of Jennifer Goldenberg, Co-Chair, led a skills based session on Sharon Ellison's process of Powerful Non-Defensive Communication. Her process has been found by many to be a very effective tool in the practice of law to assist in communications with clients, opposing counsel and support staff. The session was well attended, with 51 participants who learned to communicate in a manner that:

- Promotes confidence and assurance;
- Prompts others to speak in a way that quickly gets to the core of the matter;
- Gives direct feedback without being judgmental;
- Expresses thoughts with clarity and power without being adversarial;
- Sets firm boundaries that create respect, clear expectations and reciprocity.

## **Boost Your Social Intelligence**

For the fifth year in a row, the WLF teamed up with the Women's Enterprise Centre for our spring professional development networking event. The successful event took place on April 19, 2012, at the Plug-In Institute of Contemporary Art and features Lewena Bayer, CEO of Civility Experts Worldwide. Our members had an opportunity to network with other female professionals and entrepreneurs while enjoying wine, appetizers and music, and to learn about the costs of incivility (not that any of us have ever been uncivil!). It was a fun, informative and interactive evening. Lewena Bayer helped us to acquire skills to build confidence, demonstrate courtesy and network successfully. We all successfully mastered the art of shaking someone's hand while holding a wine glass, plate and napkin! The event was chaired by Kathryn Hordienko, Member-at-Large.

## **Celebrating Success**

Our final event of the year, a wine and cheese reception for women lawyers and judges will be held on the evening of June 14, 2012, at the Blackstone Lounge, Taylor McCaffrey LLP. Co-hosted by the Women Lawyers' Forum and the Manitoba component of the Canadian Chapter of the International Association of Women Judges, we will be honouring the upcoming retirement of Judge Marva Smith, and the appointment of Justice Holly Beard to the Court of Appeal of Manitoba.

Special thanks must go to this year's Executive who have collaborated well and worked very hard in bringing the ideas for these events into reality: Vice-chair, Nicole Merrick; Secretary, Shannon Breckman; Past-Chairs Baerbel Langner and Judge Carena Roller; Members-at-Large: Pat Lane, Karen Dyck, Kristin Gibson, Kathryn Hordienko, Emily Kaplan, Colleen McDuff, Riva Richard and Calla Coughlan. As well, a big thank you to MBA Executive Director Stacy Nagle and Sections Coordinator Melissa Tannahill; your support and guidance is very much appreciated.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jennifer Goldenberg and Justice Brenda Keyser, Co-Chairs