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Good Ole Girls' Club

by Lindsay Verity,
GAWL President, 2011-2012

My brother is probably the only one who has actually asked me what I am sure many people are thinking – why do you need a group to support only women lawyers? He asked what I have against men and suggested that it might be better to assimilate. He also wondered why I, specifically, would be involved when I work at a non-profit surrounded by women.

It is easy to understand why GAWL was formed in 1928. At that time, there were less than two dozen women practicing law in Georgia and they banded together to work for basic equality. They realized that their individual voices would be stronger if they came together to raise their voices. There are several examples of how gender-prejudiced these women were, including not being admitted into certain law schools, the difficulty of finding jobs as lawyers, and being barred from serving on juries. Since that time, we have overcome significant obstacles and gradually broken just about every barrier. However, as I told my brother, breaking the barriers is only the start. Yes, things are not as bad as they were before but we haven't exactly dismantled the good ole boys' club.

As long as women are not members of the informal good ole boys'

club, we need to establish our own good ole girls' club. We will never achieve equality unless we support each other in the same way that the men have been doing for centuries. We need to refer clients to each other, support women running for office, and send women into the



Lindsay Verity

boardroom. GAWL exists because there are still women working in firms without any other women, without family leave policies, and without equal pay. Sexual harassment and discrimination based on gender are still prevalent - just ask the GAWL attorney who brought in over \$200,000 last year in these types of cases referred solely by other GAWL members.

On the flip side, I work for Atlanta Legal Aid, a non-profit organization, and certainly don't have to worry about rainmaking, as there are always plenty of people living in poverty who need our

services. As I don't ever want to be a judge, I'm not the President of GAWL to "get my name out there." I have never experienced any sexual harassment or discrimination. Most of the attorneys at my firm are women. Then why do I devote so much time to GAWL? Quite simply, I deeply believe in our mission of enhancing the welfare of women lawyers. My life as a lawyer is improved if the lives of all women lawyers are improved. It becomes easier to be an attorney when our profession is respected in the community. When I get frustrated with something at work, I have a network of people to turn to for advice. GAWL has provided me with leadership opportunities that were unavailable at my job. My clients have also benefited from the GAWL members who have taken pro bono cases from me and who have "adopted" my clients at the holidays. I am learning to be an effective advocate at the legislature for issues in which I believe.

And, of course, we're still waiting for our first female United States Supreme Court Chief Justice.

Lindsay C. Verity is the Director of the Grandparent/Relative Caregiver Project at the Atlanta Legal Aid Society. Lindsay assists relatives with adopting or gaining custody of the children in their care and trains volunteer attorneys to handle adoption cases for these long-term caregivers.

News from the Savannah Chapter of GAWL

THE SAVANNAH CHAPTER of GAWL ended its year for the summer with a cocktail reception at Lulu's Chocolate Bar in downtown Savannah. Members enjoyed chocolate treats and cocktails, and heard the incoming Savannah Chapter President, Francesca Macchiaverna's plans for the upcoming

2011-2012 year. The Savannah Chapter began its membership drive for the next year, encouraging attorneys to renew their membership or take advantage of the benefits of GAWL membership for the first time. To renew, please go online to www.gawl.org.

GAWL congratulates Jennifer

Campbell of Thomerson & Macchiaverna P.C., the Vice President of the Savannah Chapter of GAWL. She received the Georgia Young Lawyers' Division's Outstanding Service to the Bar award at the 2011 annual Bar Meeting in Myrtle Beach.

Financial Planning Critical When Launching New Law Firm

Case Study: Successful Partners-and Partnerships-Need a Strong Foundation

Across America, new law firms are springing up every day as a result of downsizing or because lawyers desire more freedom in their practice. Whatever the reason, it takes sound financial planning to ensure success for the partners, the staff, and the firm itself.

SunTrust's Legal Specialty Group recently helped five partners put their fledgling law firm on the right track from the very beginning. All five were committed to building a profitable firm with strong credit, as well as rebuilding their retirement savings and personal balance sheets, which had suffered losses over the last two years. The partners had additional financial needs for the firm, such as optimizing their insurance coverage and obtaining a line of credit to support cash-flow shortfalls incurred during cash funding prior to settlement. They met with their SunTrust Legal Specialty Group Client Advisor to

strategize. Here is what their Client Advisor recommended:

1. The first thing she recommended was that they seek the advice of a business attorney to create and execute a partnership agreement outlining how funding would take place for the partners and their families should various scenarios occur (disability, divorce, voluntary sale, death).

2. Understanding the desire to get their retirement plans back on track, the advisor suggested running retirement modules for each partner and reviewing the desirability of Roth IRA conversions.

3. For the firm, she discussed several options available to institute a new workplace retirement plan. As part of this discussion, she encouraged the partners to write an investment management policy statement that aligned the firm's retirement needs and cash flow. Knowing that this could be a daunting task, she provided a sample investment policy statement and

scheduled a follow-up meeting with the appropriate advisors.

4. She also discussed various short- and long-term financing options and next steps to meet the firm's credit needs. She highlighted the difference between credit lines, partner loans and equipment term loans and leases.

5. Finally, in discussing risk management, the advisor recognized that the firm's E&O and disability coverage appeared to be adequate, but noted that each partner should consider personal indemnity and disability income insurance.

To find an advisor, please contact GAWL member Elizabeth Zielinski at 404-724-3928 or elizabeth.zielinski@suntrust.com or visit www.SunTrust.com/Law.

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Supporting Divorcing Attorneys by Carla Schiff

"You can't come to work and just boo hoo" said Debra Chambers, an attorney with Swift, Currie, McGhee & Hiers, LLP. In addition to the apprehensions of being a client in an unfamiliar area of the law, women lawyers, like everyone else, have to manage and process the emotions of a divorce.

"There's so much pressure; it's got to come out somewhere," said Chambers. Finding that hibernating in her office with the door closed wasn't enough, Chambers attended a weekend retreat with Visions Anew--a nonprofit, 501(c)3 corporation dedicated to providing support for individuals, primarily women, going through a divorce. Chambers had misgivings about attending the "Divorce Survival Weekend" and would have left shortly after arriving but for a snowstorm. As the weekend progressed, she was able to share her story in a com-

fortable, nonjudgmental and confidential environment. By the end of the weekend, she was able to let go. She was glad that she stayed.

Lynn Sturges with The Law Office of Lynn H. Sturges also found a "safe outlet to tell [her] story" at one of the retreats, as did Deborah Ebel, an attorney with McKenna

"You can't just fall apart. You don't have the luxury to check out."

Long & Aldridge LLP. Ebel noted, "very few people want to be bothered listening to your tale of woe; even family and friends tune out after a while. . . . Even those of use who consider ourselves 'tough cookies' need a place to break down."

"As an attorney, you are very good at the business side of things. You have success in your job, success in your life--how could you fail?" said Michelle Araúz, an attorney with SunTrust. "You can't just fall apart. You don't have the luxury to check out." And as a mother of a young child, Araúz could not fall apart or check out at home either.

When Araúz arrived at her retreat, she was immediately greeted by a program alumnus, who carried her bags to her room. For this "self-sufficient female attorney, [it] wasn't necessary but it really helped to feel taken care of."

At these retreats, alumni cook the meals and work to make new attendees feel at home, showing that there is life after divorce. While some of the programs involve empowering information from

See **Divorce**, page 3

Divorce, *from page 2*

legal, financial and therapeutic experts, other programs allow time to share and listen. Some attendees come ready to share, while others come to listen.

Ebel, who came to a retreat with a healthy dose of skepticism, was surprised that she found herself participating, sharing and even “letting loose” as the retreat ended with Zumba dancing.

There’s no question that going through a divorce is “extremely distracting and overwhelming,” said Sturges. Indeed, presenteeism—the problem of employees being on the job but not fully productive due to illness, conflicts at home or other stressors, “appears to be a much costlier prob-

lem than its productivity—reducing counterpart, absenteeism.”¹ This is known all too well by any attorney with a crucial staff member going through a divorce. To mitigate the presenteeism caused by divorce, employers can provide a confidential subsidy for employees to attend a seminar or a retreat.

Likewise, employers can provide in-house education. Recognizing that many employees cannot afford to attend a retreat or seminar, Visions Anew created a unique, panel presentation, entitled “Divorce-Proofing Your Marriage and Helping a Divorcing Friend,” which educates men and women about various aspects of the divorce process in-house. In April, Visions Anew

presented a similar program for the 9,000 employees at the Centers for Disease Control.

Whether you are a lawyer facing divorce or own a law firm with a long-time associate who is struggling, take advantage of the resources available. Reach out and be reminded—there is life after divorce.

Carla M. Schiff is an attorney at Stern and Edlin, P.C., where she focuses her practice on family law, including divorce, custody, child support and prenuptial agreements. She has been practicing family law exclusively since 2001.

¹“Presenteeism: At Work—But Out of It,” by Paul Hemp, Harvard Business Review October 2004.

GAWL Welcomes Its Newest Sponsor

Joan M. Boneberg, M.S., CCC-SLP, Business Communication Coach, Board Certified Speech Pathologist, and author of, “Communication Chemistry: 25 Essential Elements to Make You a Compelling Communicator,” is President of Speech Improvement Resources, LLC, located in Johns Creek, Georgia.

Joan serves business professionals who have a career need or personal desire to be skillful communicators. Offerings include “immersion” listening, body language, presentation, effective networking, “elevator speeches,” interviewing, and accent reduction skills. Learn more about Joan and Speech Improvement Resources, LLC, at <http://speakingsspecialist.com>.

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