

The Catalyst

The newsletter of the Illinois State Bar Association's Standing Committee on Women and the Law

Chair's column

BY LORI LEVIN

On May 17, the Women and the Law Committee, in conjunction with the Women's Bar Association of Illinois, the Black Women's Lawyers Association, and North Shore Law, will present a Continuing Legal Education program, Girls in Crisis: Foster Care and Unaccompanied Immigrants.

The program and preceding lunch features award-winning national speakers and the Interim Director of the Department of Children and Family Services. We are grateful to Tomasik Kotin

Kasserman LLC which has graciously sponsored the program and lunch allowing us to charge attendees a nominal fee of \$25, for the afternoon at Loyola Law School.

Lynn Price, a former Illinois foster child who now lives in Colorado, will be our keynote speaker and panelist. Twenty-five years ago, Lynn founded Camp to Belong, which has reunited more than 13,000 siblings who live in separate foster, adoptive or relative homes for a camping experience at sites throughout the United

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Taking the leap

Earlier this year, Women and the Law Member Erin Wilson took a leap that was a long time in the making. After 10 years helping another female lawyer, Gail O'Connor, build her family law practice, Erin hung up her own shingle and launched The Law Office of Erin M. Wilson LLC. She and I sat down to discuss how and why she took the leap.

What inspired you to go out on your own?

After 10 years of developing my skills and learning how to manage complex cases through to trial, I no longer had any fear holding me back. I wanted flexibility for myself and my family and felt like I could

best do that through my own firm.

What advice do you have for other attorneys who want to launch their own firm?

Get some experience under your belt first. Working for another firm for ten years allowed me to build up my legal skills and also learn about business development and management of team members. I had a great experience as an employee and as a partner and I feel like that taught me a lot about running a business without the risks of being on my own.

Plus, the clients and relationships I developed working for my prior firm followed me and gave me a solid base to

start from.

How did you handle your exit from your prior firm?

I worked with a great partner who taught me a lot so it was important for me to leave in a way that was respectful of her. I made sure that I did not discuss my plans with anyone in the firm until after she and I spoke and I gave her the opportunity to determine how we would announce my separation. We told both the office and our clients together.

We both handled everything in a way that was positive and allowed us to maintain

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States and Australia. Her passion has garnered her many awards, including the Presidents Service Award from President Clinton, Oprah's Angel Network Use Your Life Award and the University of Illinois Humanitarian Award.

We are also thankful that Debra Dyer-Webster, the Interim Director of the Department of Children and Family Services will present on the issues currently facing girls in the foster care system and how, we as lawyers, can provide pro bono help for such girls. Ms. Dyer-Webster has spent 28 years working for DCFS and has held many positions including Chief Deputy Director, Guardianship Administrator and Chief Deputy General Counsel.

Chiquita Oglesby, a dedicated Danville social worker, who has served as a rehabilitation counselor, a foster care team supervisor and a care coordinator and is a licensed foster care parent, will round out our panel on girls in foster care.

Our outstanding speakers on unaccompanied immigrant girls are Ashley Huebner, associate director of legal services at the National Immigrant Justice Center and Sara Elizabeth Dill, a partner at Anethum Global in Washington, DC.

Ms. Huebner oversees the NIJC's Asylum Project and immigrant children's programs. She specializes in asylum issues related to gender-based claims and unaccompanied children. She conducts legal trainings and provides technical support to pro bono attorneys who take on such cases under the auspices of NIJC. Ms. Huebner regularly lectures at national trainings regarding these issues and complex immigration topics.

Ms. Dill's practice includes legal representation, consulting and lobbying throughout the world. She previously served as a Commissioner for the ABA Commission on Immigration among other leadership positions within the American Bar Association. She has an extensive pro bono practice, representing victims of

human trafficking and domestic violence, as well as successfully litigating asylum and convention against torture cases. She is a regular voice on national and international media outlets, including CNN, Al Jazeera, ABC News, NBC News, NPR, BBC and other outlets. She was a founding member of the Dulles Justice Coalition, an organization of attorneys mobilized to provide legal assistance in response to Executive Orders and the Muslim Ban. She has also given a TED Talk on why Girls and Women Should Not Be Weapons of War.

Needless to say, the program will be exciting. The speakers are expected to provide not only background material on these important issues but also how, we as a legal community, can individually and collectively assist these girls in crisis. Interested persons can register for the lunch and program at https://www.isba.org/cle/path?pathPage=%2Fisba%2Fcourses%2F11467%2Fin_person_events%2F297. ■

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The Catalyst

This is the newsletter of the ISBA's Standing Committee on Women & the Law. Section newsletters are free to section members and published at least four times per year. Section membership dues are \$30 per year. To subscribe, visit www.isba.org/sections or call 217-525-1760.

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Taking the Leap

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our relationship.

What have been the biggest challenges of starting your own firm?

First, my husband and I are now both entrepreneurs, which makes everything a bit scarier. He has had his firm for 3 years so it is a bit more established, but it's still a young firm. At the same time, he has gone through everything I am experiencing so it is nice to have a sounding board who understands the challenges I am facing.

The hardest part has been learning to do everything on my own. Before, I had a team of associates, law clerks and paralegals. Now, I have to handle the online filing system, decide what software to use and manage all aspects of my cases completely on my own. I'm learning something new every day.

I'm also learning better time management

skills, in that I have to be the lawyer, business developer, office manager, and mom. There are many early mornings and late nights.

What did you do to prepare prior to launching your firm?

I sat down with friends and colleagues who have launched their own firms. Sarah Toney, who is also a member, gives a lot of presentations about how to launch your own firm and build a practice. She gave me her checklist. It included things like building a website, getting malpractice insurance, creating forms for client intakes, creating a retainer agreement, and all the basics that can be easily overlooked.

Lawyers spend most of their time advising clients and litigating matters.

What do you do to generate business?

The community of divorce attorneys is really supportive. I let my colleagues and judges know about some of the more unique services I am offering, such as serving as a neutral in parenting coordination matters, mediation and I got on the guardian ad litem list.

The most important thing is reconnecting with friends, associates and colleagues. I spent the last ten years primarily focusing solely on practicing law. Now, I need to manage my time better so that I can continue providing my clients with great service while also building more relationships and developing more business.

I am excited to be completely in control of my career and my future. ■

International Women's Day afternoon tea at the Langham

BY KELLY THAMES BENNETT

On March 8, 2019, the ISBA Standing Committee on Women & the Law Committee hosted our third annual celebration of International Women's Day over afternoon tea at the Langham Hotel in Chicago. The event was an opportunity to gather with other women (and men) to honor the contributions of women to the legal profession.

Afternoon tea consists of a light, bite-sized meal composed of tea sandwiches and savories, scones with clotted cream and jam and pastries. Interestingly, afternoon tea is not the same as high tea. Afternoon tea was a concept started in England in the 1800s when the Duchess of Bedford wanted a small bite between lunch and dinner. Afternoon tea, also called low tea, was around 4 p.m. at low tables with comfortable chairs and sofas in the drawing room. It was intended to be a snack and not a replacement for dinner. High

tea, on the other hand, was a working class family's nourishing evening meal, consisting of meat dishes, potatoes, baked beans, and other heavy dishes. High tea was taken at high dining tables.

Everyone raved about our latest location for the afternoon tea at the Langham, and we look forward to continuing the annual tradition in the coming years. As has been the tradition, the event sold-out and had a waiting list, so we look forward to expanding the size of the event to accommodate more members next year. Next year, International Women's Day will fall on the weekend, so tentatively mark your calendars for Friday, March 6, 2019 for our 4th annual afternoon tea.

The full photo gallery from the event is available on The Bar News: <https://bit.ly/2CcC9qY>. ■

1. <https://www.ohhowcivilized.com/afternoon-tea-101-afternoon-tea-and-high-tea-definitions/>.



WATL enjoys afternoon tea at the Langham Hotel

Creating gender equality: Takeaways

BY SANDRA CRAWFORD

On March 7, 2019, my Collaborative Process Financial Neutral colleague, Nicole Romito, and her business partner, Mary Beth McLean, co-founders of Project Venus at Private Vista, LLC (www.myprivatevista.com) sponsored the third annual breakfast event in honor of International Women's Day. This event featured three panelists, including attorney and WGN radio personality, Karen Conti, <https://www.kcontilaw.com/>.

The panel engaged in an interactive dialogue with the audience on the important topic of "Moving Forward Together: Creating Gender Equality in Your Workplace." With Nicole's permission I share here with my ISBA Women and The Law colleagues some of the event takeaways.

Lead by example – the best way to bring out good behavior in others is to model it yourself.

- Act appropriately and treat others with respect. Apply the Golden Rule.
- Make a conscious effort to be inclusive. Here are some ways to do that:
 - Assemble people with diverse backgrounds for company/firm committees and work projects
 - Create an environment that is open and encourages employees to address the issue with one another.
 - Encourage equitable participation among all attendees at work meetings.
 - Control work meetings to avoid one person dominating the discussion.
 - Recognize the person who raises a good point and/or makes a significant contribution to the discussion.
 - Give credit where credit is due – don't minimize the value of any individual's contribution to the

group.

Never underestimate the power of mentoring.

- Launch a mentoring program that has a defined structure and company-wide (firm-wide) commitment.
- Highlight the importance of the program at company/firm events and in communications.
- Develop an atmosphere of trust to promote open dialogue between mentor and mentees.

Find your voice.

- Negotiate when you feel that you deserve a better salary or larger bonus.
- Bring examples of where you have added value to the firm, team, company.
- Research pay standards and benefits for your job in your industry.

Continue the conversation about equality across all lines, among men and women.

Understand the dynamics of your work place and what is acceptable.

- Remember that inequality applies not just to gender – but also age, race, and religion.
- Review the employee handbook to learn how to handle uncomfortable situations.
- Talk amongst yourselves! Keep the issue at the forefront with honest, but polite, debate.

My personal takeaway and continued commitment for 2019-20 is around mentoring. Within the ISBA community, we are so very lucky to already have a structured mentoring program (learn more at <https://www.isba.org/newlawyers/mentoring>). Having been a mentor for several years now within this program, both to female and male mentees, has allowed me to "find

my voice" and help others find theirs. Mentoring also provides a readymade forum for learning to "lead by example". Checking those boxes has led to a solid sense of accomplishment and career satisfaction. Not to mention earning CLE credit in way that differs from the run-of-the-mill type programming.

Thanks much Nicole and Mary Beth and Project Venus. Already looking forward to International Women's Day 2020! ■

Good news column

- On March 2, 2019 the Lake County Women's Coalition's Visionary Women in Lake County honored the Honorable Judge Elizabeth Rochford. Congratulations! ■

Defending and protecting the rights of transgender people

BY JUDGE ANN BREEN-GRECO

When my youngest child told me that she was experiencing difficulty, her language let me know that she was feeling gender dysphoria, experienced by people whose gender identity does not align with their sex assigned at birth. I wanted to do whatever I could to support my child but also to defend the rights of transgender people. I found a transgender center in Los Angeles and my daughter has begun her transition to being a male. He will soon file papers in court for a name change.

A series of decisions by the Obama administration changed the legal concept of gender in federal programs, including in education and health care, recognizing gender largely as an individual's choice and not determined by the sex assigned at birth. Under the current administration, the Department of Health and Human Services began an effort to establish a legal definition of sex under Title IX, the federal civil rights law that bans gender discrimination in education programs that receive government financial assistance, according to a memo obtained by The New York Times. The Department argued in its memo that key government agencies needed to adopt an explicit and uniform definition of gender: "Sex means a person's status as male or female based on immutable biological traits identifiable by or before birth," the department proposed in the memo. "The sex listed on a person's birth certificate, as originally issued, shall constitute definitive proof of a person's sex unless rebutted by reliable genetic evidence." The new definition would eradicate federal recognition of the estimated 1.4 million Americans who have opted to recognize themselves—surgically or otherwise—as a gender other than the one they were born

into.

The move would be the most significant of a series of steps to exclude the transgender population from civil rights protections and roll back the Obama administration's recognition of expanded gender identity. The administration has legally challenged civil rights protections for transgender people embedded in the nation's health care law. Several agencies have withdrawn Obama-era policies that recognized gender identity in schools, prisons and homeless shelters. The current administration sought to bar transgender people from serving in the military and the Supreme Court agreed.

In addition to the inhumanity of denying people their personhood, the arguments advanced by the administration are not supported by the medical profession. Defining gender as a condition determined strictly by a person's genitals is based on a notion that doctors and scientists abandoned long ago as oversimplified and often medically meaningless. Researchers who have studied gender issues and provided health care to people who do not fit the typical M/F categories said that the Trump administration's latest plan to define gender goes beyond the limits of scientific knowledge. Nonetheless, in many areas of the country there is still lack of good qualified medical help and mental health practitioners for transgender people.

Additionally, there is another concern - the rights of transgender children who also have special needs.

To establish protection in law for transgender people, there is a bill in Congress, The Equality Act, that, if passed, would amend the Civil Rights Act of

1964 to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity and would provide consistent and explicit non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ people across key areas of life, in employment, housing, public accommodations, public education, federal funding, credit, and the jury system.

Over the decades since their passing, civil rights laws are shown to be effective in decreasing discrimination because they provide strong federal remedies targeted to specific vulnerable groups. By explicitly including sexual orientation and gender identity in these fundamental laws, LGBTQ people will finally be afforded the same protections as other covered characteristics under federal law. The bipartisan Equality Act was introduced in the House of Representatives and Senate on March 13, 2019. The bill was introduced with 287 original cosponsors—the most congressional support that any piece of pro-LGBTQ legislation has received upon introduction. The American Bar Association is drafting a letter in support of the legislation.

Also, there is one small victory for transgender rights – United Airlines will provide travelers a broader range of options than male or female when selecting gender during making reservations. ■