

Institute Prepares Women for Leadership



By Mary W. Sullivan

Imagine having the opportunity to be one of a small group of up-and-coming Ohio attorneys who are able to hear from and interact with current Ohio Supreme Court justices, current state and federal court judges, a former attorney general and auditor of the state of Ohio, corporate counsel from some of the major companies in our state, and other successful attorneys and business people from around Ohio. Imagine having the opportunity to hear from those judges and attorneys about how they made it to where they are today and to ask them questions in a personal setting. Imagine further that every one of the attorneys in this small group is a woman. That is exactly what is taking place thanks to the

Ohio Women’s Bar Foundation Leadership Institute.

The Ohio Women’s Bar Foundation, a 501(c)(3) entity, was established in 2010 by the Ohio Women’s Bar Association with the goal of increasing the number of women entering leadership roles in the legal profession. A group of women who are recognized leaders in our profession were invited to form an advisory committee to help guide the formation of a Leadership Institute for women attorneys. The advisory committee includes Chief Justice Maureen O’Connor as well as Justices Judith Ann Lanzinger and Yvette McGee-Brown of the Ohio Supreme Court; U.S. District Court Magistrate Judge Vernelis Kinsey Armstrong;

former Attorney General and Auditor of the State of Ohio Betty Montgomery; and Maria Kortan-Sampson, general counsel to the Goodrich Corporation. (The complete advisory committee list is below.) I was honored to be asked to serve on the advisory committee with such distinguished women.

You might ask why we need another Leadership Institute. Doesn’t the Ohio State Bar Association — as well as our own Cincinnati Bar Association — have their own leadership institutes? That question was answered in a recent address by Jennifer Breech Rhoads, the 20th president of the Ohio Women’s Bar Association. While almost half of law school graduates are now women, she noted that “the line tracking women’s share of leadership roles follows a straighter downward path as the potential to assume a leadership role rises.” The Ohio Women’s Bar Association was created to provide support networks and mentoring opportunities for women so that women can claim their rightful share of those leadership roles.

Through an application process open to women in practice at least five years, 11 women from around Ohio were selected for the Leadership Institute’s inaugural class. The group includes attorneys from law firms, corporate in-house counsel and women who work in the courts.

During six one-day sessions wrapping up this month in Columbus, the attorneys have the opportunity to hone their leadership skills and hear from women who have gone before them facing similar challenges in the workplace.

Advisory Committee of the Ohio Women’s Bar Foundation Leadership Institute

Joan U. Allgood

The Hon. Vernelis Kinsey Armstrong
U.S. District Court,
Northern District of Ohio

Marcia Egbert
The George Gund Foundation

Maria A. Kortan-Sampson
Goodrich Corporation

The Hon. Judith Ann Lanzinger
The Supreme Court of Ohio

Cynthia C. Lazarus
Flying Horse Farms

Margaret J. Lockhart
Coopers & Walinski, LPA

The Hon. Yvette McGee Brown
The Supreme Court of Ohio

The Hon. Betty D. Montgomery
Former Attorney General and
Auditor of the State of Ohio
MacMurray Petersen & Shuster

The Hon. Maureen O’Connor
The Supreme Court of Ohio

Kathleen Hayes Ransier
Vorys Sater Seymour & Pease LLP

Mary W. Sullivan
Peck Shaffer & Williams LLP

Maxine S. Thomas
Charles F. Kettering Foundation

The group has had the opportunity to hear from women rainmakers, including Kelly Mulloy Myers of Freking & Betz in Cincinnati. They have listened to Elizabeth Rader from the Cleveland Clinic Foundation and Maria Kortan-Sampson of the Goodrich Corporation talk about the client's perspective of working with lawyers. The leadership class has heard about technology and the ethical issues emerging in the electronic age from U.S. District Court Mag. Judge Vernelis Armstrong. Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor is scheduled to speak on the keys to effective communication. Judge Penny Cunningham from the First District Court of Appeals, will join the chief justice on a panel to discuss how to communicate with the courts.

And, yes, the class is hearing from men, as well. Jack Kuntz, former President of First Franklin Corporation and currently president and CEO of Community Bank Improvement Group in Cincinnati, spoke about how and why he hires lawyers to represent his companies and business interests. Frank Agin of AmSpirit Business Connections spoke about how to use social media for networking and marketing.

I had the privilege of addressing the inaugural class at dinner on the evening prior to its first session. I welcomed them as they began their journey of making new contacts, friends and strides in their legal professions.

I also had the privilege of participating in the rainmaking panel during the first session. My advice? Get involved — whether it is with the Bar Association, in politics (either as a volunteer or candidate), or for a non-profit corporation. If you don't know who to contact about getting involved, ask some of the other people where you work to see if they have any contacts with the groups that interest you. If you are still not able to make a necessary contact, call your local bar association. We are quite fortunate in Cincinnati to have the CBA with members representing so many interests in our community. Many doors will open when we give of our time and talents to others.

Reactions have been uniformly positive from the members of the Leadership Institute class. Erin Sutton, recently

elected to partnership with Peck Shaffer & Williams, LLP, said the monthly sessions “inspire me to grow both personally and professionally as we work on our ability to step up and become leaders in not only the legal field but also in society.” Martha Asseff, an attorney with Dinsmore & Shohl, summed up the thoughts of many participants, saying, “I am so grateful that a cross-section of women lawyers in Ohio have come together to invest in our collective professional development.”

If you are interested in becoming a member of the next Leadership Institute class starting in September, or if you know a woman whom you believe should be a part of that next class, visit the Ohio Women's Bar Foundation website at www.owba.org/foundation. Selection of the class members will be made in April and announced at the OWBA's annual meeting in Columbus. 

Sullivan has been an attorney with the firm of Peck Shaffer & Williams LLP since 1980, where she practices in the field of public finance law. She has served on numerous boards and commissions, including as chairman of the Ohio Elections Commission, chairman of the Public Defender Commission of Hamilton County, President of the Catholic Social Services Board of Southwestern Ohio, and member of the Seton High School Board of Trustees, among many others.