

Bench & Bar

The newsletter of the Illinois State Bar Association's Bench & Bar Section

Meet Chief Judge Rebecca Pallmeyer

BY HON. ALFRED SWANSON (RET.)

On July first, Judge Rebecca Pallmeyer became the first woman to be chief judge in the 200-year history of the Federal District Court for the Northern District of Illinois. Who is Judge Pallmeyer?

Rebecca Pallmeyer was born in Tokyo and grew up in St. Louis, the daughter of a Lutheran pastor. She told me she learned a lot from her parents, whom she described as faithful, dedicated, and humble people. When we sat down in her chambers recently during a break in a criminal trial

over which she was presiding she told me “faith keeps a person humble. It makes you realize that you are not so special.” At the beginning of our talk, Judge Pallmeyer wondered why anyone would want to speak with her. The answer is simple; her becoming the first woman chief judge in the Northern District of Illinois is historical.

Judge Pallmeyer told me she is “very fortunate to be in this job,” referring not

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Strong women in law: A reflection on the WBAI Annual Dinner

BY NIHARIKA REDDY

The Women's Bar Association of Illinois (WBAI) Annual Dinner, held on May 30 this year, is always one of the most well attended events in the Chicago legal community, drawing over 700 lawyers, judges, and dignitaries. At this year's dinner, the WBAI installed Corinne C. Heggie as president, as well as its other officers and directors for 2019-20.

Following a lively reception, the guests filtered into the Grand Ballroom at the

Hilton Chicago. Margaret A. Manetti then gave the welcoming remarks, followed by an invocation by Father Jeremiah Boland. During the WBAI dinner, two distinguished members of WBAI and the legal community were honored.

Stephanie A. Scharf, who is a founding partner of Chicago's largest women-owned law firm, Scharf Banks Marmor LLC, received the Myra Bradwell Woman of Achievement Award. Scharf received a

Ph.D. in behavioral sciences and a J.D. from the University of Chicago. Before practicing law, she was senior study director at NORC, at the University of Chicago, where she designed, analyzed, and reported on a range of survey research projects. She represented businesses in complex litigation for 32 years as a partner at Kirkland & Ellis and Jenner & Block prior to starting her current firm. Scharf

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Meet Chief Judge Rebecca Pallmeyer

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to her new position as chief judge, but just being a judge. Her career has been a series of events that fit together. She graduated from Valparaiso University. Judge Pallmeyer recalled the time at Valpo when a friend in the line for lunch at the dormitory told her “you should become a lawyer because you like to argue.” Before that, law school was not on Judge Pallmeyer’s horizon. She enrolled at the University of Chicago Law School, graduating in 1979.

Looking at her resume, it would seem she pointed her career to being a judge, but it is really a series of fortunate events, of doors opened, and opportunities taken. After graduating from law school, she clerked for Minnesota Supreme Court Justice Rosalie Wahl. Then she was a commercial litigator at a large Chicago firm before becoming an administrative law judge with the Illinois Human Rights Commission. On October 1, 1991, she was appointed as magistrate judge in the northern district—a job she terms her “biggest milestone.” President Clinton nominated her to become a judge on the district court and she was confirmed on October 21, 1998. Then this spring, Judge Pallmeyer’s predecessor as chief judge, Ruben Castillo who had become the first Hispanic chief judge of the northern district, decided to do something. He chose the International Women’s Day to announce he would not finish his term as chief, to open the door for Judge Pallmeyer to become the first woman chief judge in the 200-year history of the northern district. Had Judge Castillo not stepped aside and finished the last year of his term the next chief would have been a man because the chief judge is the judge with the longest tenure in the northern district who is under age 65.

She looks back on several mentors who have guided her career. First is Justice Wahl, recalling that they often sat side-by-side writing opinions during her clerkship. While she says all judges have been supportive, Judge Pallmeyer mentioned specifically some of her predecessors as

chief judge: Judges Aspen, Holderman, and Castillo. She also mentions former Illinois Supreme Court Chief Justice Mary Ann McMorrow, who she called “a real trail blazer.” Other women judges whose accomplishments she deems significant over time are justices Sandra Day O’Connor, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and Sonia Sotomayor. She doesn’t view herself as any sort of role model, but as someone who simply “worked diligently at her career” as a judge. As Judge Pallmeyer put it, perhaps as a guide to others: “Hard work does pay back.” Lawyers who have appeared before her recognize her hard work as a judge. Her immediate predecessor, Judge Ruben Castillo, has described Judge Pallmeyer as often the first judge to arrive in the courthouse in the morning and the last to leave in the evening.

Attorney Martin Greene recalls appearing before Judge Pallmeyer in her first hearing as an ALJ at the Human Rights Commission. Greene said his early impression was that “she was younger than me. She was diligent, hard-working, and determined to make the right decision.” Greene added that in subsequent appearances before Judge Pallmeyer his experiences were always positive “even when she ruled against me.”

During her more than two decades on the federal bench, Judge Pallmeyer has presided over several significant cases. “Any long case is difficult,” she told me. One was the corruption trial of former Illinois governor George Ryan, whom she sentenced in 2006 to six-and-a-half years in prison. Another was the trial of the man who helped plot the murder of Heather Mack’s mother in Bali, whom she sentenced to nine years in prison.

Judge Pallmeyer has some specific goals in mind for her tenure as chief judge. One is the appearance of the Dirksen Federal Building at 219 S. Dearborn in Chicago, which she says must project the dignity of a courthouse, albeit from a black, metal-and-glass box. She wants to be active and continue the Court’s efforts in outreach

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to “help explain the rule of law to the community.” She also plans to remain active in the district court’s historical display at the courthouse.

Judge Pallmeyer says that “every judge feels he or she has the ability to do the job well” and she made it clear in our conversation that she wants to support all of

the judges in the northern district in doing the best jobs they can. ■

Strong women in law: A reflection on the WBAI Annual Dinner

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is one of the nation’s leading lawyers for advancing women in the law and has designed and conducted a broad range of empirical studies about women in the law.

Ms. Scharf has also served as the chair of the American Bar Association Commission on Women in the Profession and co-chairs the ABA Presidential Initiative, Achieving Long-term Careers for Women Lawyers. This initiative focuses especially on innovative research projects, which are being conducted in collaboration with the American Bar Foundation. As an aspiring attorney, Ms. Sharf’s inspiring speech and words of wisdom, left me feeling empowered. Often times, female law students find ourselves faced with imposter syndrome and second guessing our decisions. Seeing an extremely accomplished and experienced attorney give a speech about the impact that we can make was nothing short of remarkable.

Next, the incoming President, Corinne Cantwell Heggie, was sworn in by Justice Thomas L. Kilbride of the Illinois Supreme Court. Heggie is an owner of Wochner

Law Firm LLC, a firm dedicated to helping individuals and companies preserve their wealth. Before joining the Wochner Law Firm, Heggie practiced as a partner at a national law firm and then as counsel at the largest majority women-owned law firm in Illinois. She has chaired several events and committees in service to the WBAI and has also spoken about diversity in the legal profession on the WBAI’s behalf at the Northwest Suburban Bar Association and St. Louis University College of Law.

Maggie Hickey, a partner and practice group leader at Schiff Hardin LLP, delivered the keynote address for the evening. Hickey has a wealth of experience in internal investigations, compliance programs, sexual harassment issues in the workplace, and ethics training. In 2015, she was appointed executive inspector general for the Agencies of the Illinois Governor, an independent executive branch state agency that ensures accountability across state government, nine state public universities, and four Chicago-area regional transportation boards.

During her powerful speech, Hickey

delivered a phrase that resonated with the whole room: “Nice is a superpower.” She went on to explain that it is “nice to be important but more important to be nice.” Oftentimes, being nice is seen as a weakness in attorneys as it may convey a message of being a “push-over.” But, as Hickey explained, we must “choose respect, decency, and kindness” in order to uphold the civility and sanctity of the legal profession. Being nice and a zealous advocate are not mutually exclusive. I, along with a few of my classmates from the University Of Illinois College Of Law, left the evening with ambition running through us. Being surrounded by attorneys and judges who have all left their impact on the legal profession inspired us to strive further and earn our place among the remarkable professionals who attended the WBAI annual dinner. Strong women in law are paving the way to a day when it won’t come as a surprise when a woman is in a position of power. ■

Working together to increase awareness and reduce stigma of mental illness

BY SANDY BLAKE

For the first time in many years, the Mental Health Section Council held its monthly meeting outside the Chicago Regional Office. On April 15, the Section Council conducted its business in the Illinois Bar Center in Springfield.

Unfortunately, the actual meeting was

somewhat sparsely attended, due in large part to the blizzard that hit the state on Sunday, April 14. For those who braved the hazardous weather, the agenda after the meeting was well worth the trip.

After the business meeting adjourned, Section Council members walked next

door to the Illinois Supreme Court, for an amazing event planned by Justice Anne M. Burke. Although the Court was not in session, Justice Burke not only agreed to host the gathering, she made it a priceless event!

Justice Burke and Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission Executive

Director John A. Lupton greeted Section Council members at the door to the Court. The two then personally conducted a guided tour of the Supreme Court building—from the basement where Court records were originally archived to the Justices' living quarters when court is in session. Attendees met with **Carolyn Taft Grosboll**, the Clerk of the Supreme Court, and Supreme Court Research Director John Robinson and part of his team.

During lunch in the appellate courtroom, the group watched an edited version of the *Insanity Retrial of Mary Todd Lincoln*, focusing on the examination of expert witnesses Bennett L. Leventhal, MD and James L. Cavanaugh, MD. Following the re-enactment, the group moved across the hall to the Supreme Court Courtroom, where Justice Burke and John Lupton concluded the tour in the Court's deliberation chamber. They then led a discussion following the video in the courtroom.

Present day mental health issues became the next focus of the discussion, as Hon. Mary K. O'Brien, Appellate Justice in the 3rd District and President of the Lawyer's Assistance Program Board of Directors; Hon. Lauren Ediden, Associate Judge in Cook County 2nd Municipal District Court, who oversees the Mental Health Court; and

Cheryl Potts, Director, The Kennedy Forum Illinois, each talked about the programs they work with and the mental health implications.

Justice Burke concluded the program with a call to action, challenging the members of the ISBA Mental Health Section to work to increase awareness of mental health issues and treatment. Recognizing the many resources of the ISBA—newsletters such as this one, CLE programs, "Ask a Lawyer" videos for the public and "Quicktakes" videos for lawyers—as well as the many practice sections in which lawyers are affected

personally or professionally by mental illness, the challenge seems a little less daunting. The Mental Health Section Council is looking at ways to meet the challenge and accomplish the goal of increased awareness and reduced stigma of mental health issues and treatment, and welcomes any ideas. Please consider this your personal invitation to join in that effort! ■

Sandy Blake is the current chair of the Mental Health Section Council and vice-chair of Bench and Bar. Contact her at sandyb9960@comcast.net.



In honor of Miss Minor

BY ADRIENNE W. ALBRECHT

When I was growing up, my parents had ten children and no wealth. Surprisingly, though, they had an attorney, Miss Eva Minor. I remember my mother's uncle, who was conservator for his friend's widow, had frequent occasion to visit her. My parents had one of her famous \$10 wills. So, the thought of a woman being an attorney seemed normal to me. How very fortunate and naïve I was. It was only later that I learned that the path for women in the practice of law was not easy. Later still, I came to appreciate the role that Miss Minor

played in forging the route for women like me.

Miss Minor, you see, studied in a lawyer's office and passed the test to become a lawyer in 1924. Yes, 1924. She told me that she went to work in order to help provide support for her parents' large family. When she passed the Bar Exam, in a year when many men failed it, it was big news. There were newspaper articles in towns across the Midwest. She even made front-page headlines in Havana, Cuba. Not only was she the first female lawyer in Kankakee, her

career was one of the longest. She practiced law for over 50 years.

During her long career, she was enormously successful. One prominent aspect of her career was representing the railroads. As testament to her success as a trial attorney, Dick Ackman, another legendary attorney who came along much later, told me that he once tried a case against her to a small verdict in his client's favor. When he asked her how his client would get paid, she told him that she'd have to check on it. She'd never lost a case before.

I had the good fortune of being able to seek out Miss Minor's advice as I began my legal career. It was most enlightening. When I reported a job offer that I received after law school from a lawyer who I've since learned was notorious for his irascible and selfish nature, her diplomatic response was simply, "Best to keep looking." When I reported an interview with Lenny Sacks, with whom I successfully partnered in the practice of law for 26 years, she assured me that working with him would be rewarding. She was right on both counts.

One day, as I was working on an esoteric question involving real estate litigation, I was having difficulty wrapping my brain around the issues. Since her office was just below mine, and she was in the twilight of her practice, I walked down the stairs and asked if she was available. She was happy to see me. During our conversation, she pulled out her "appeal book." In there, she'd logged her extensive list of cases she'd handled on appeal. One look at the list made me realize that she'd participated in most of the landmark cases in the Illinois Supreme Court and appellate court to come out of our county. Researching her name in a legal search engine reveals that she participated in lawsuits involving the construction of the trust establishing the Fortin Villa, the breakup of a medical practice and

enforceability of a covenant not to compete, estate contests involving well known families, and complicated contests over real estate. Many of them are still good law.

As she told me, her solo career got started during the depression. She represented farmers who had defaulted on their loans and were in foreclosure proceedings. At that time, mortgage foreclosures were tried before juries. She said that the fellow farmers would fill the courtroom gallery for these trials. The sole purpose was intimidation, she reported. It frequently worked. At community meetings the farmers would pass the hat to pay Miss Minor. What they collected was not enough to keep her law office open. However, after the depression, when times were better and farmers wealthier, they all remembered the job she had done for them and came to her with their estates.

Miss Minor was not perfect or an angel; and she frustrated and sometimes angered her male colleagues. Her polite and demure demeanor concealed the heart of a relentless warrior. Even after her death, lawyers complained about an incident when she had an attorney appointed receiver of a farm, which appointment was later reversed. By their version, when he went to her complaining that he had enlisted all his friends to farm the ground during his brief tenure, she very politely explained to him

that she was very sorry; but could do nothing to see that he was compensated. Listening to them, I think they were confused by the juxtaposition of her personality with her advocacy.

The male lawyers also blamed her for "ruining" the annual bar picnic. It used to be held on the Parish Island in the Kankakee River outside Momence. By all accounts, they were drunken brawls predominated by drinking, nudity, and poker games. The most trusted deputy was tasked with tasting the moonshine in the evidence locker and selecting the best of it for the picnic. One day, they looked up to see Miss Minor and Miss Jesse Sumner, the pioneer female lawyer in Watseka, holding on to one another as they waded across to the picnic. After that, their wild shenanigans were no longer permitted.

At one of our last conversations, I was pregnant. Miss Minor remarked to me how wonderful it was that I could have a family and a law career at the same time. In her day, she reminded me, in order to have a successful career, she had to eat, breathe, and sleep the law. The times did not afford her the opportunity to do both. How grateful I am that she was there so that her career could inspire my imagination to think that I could be a lawyer. She lighted the path for all Kankakee County women attorneys to follow. ■

Recent appointments and retirements

1. Pursuant to its Constitutional authority, the supreme court has appointed the following to be circuit judge:

- Hon. Michael P. Gerber, Cook County Circuit, 13th Subcircuit, June 4, 2019
- Cara L. Smith, Cook County Subcircuit, 7th Subcircuit, June 17, 2019
- Thomas M. Cushing, Cook County Circuit, June 19, 2019
- John G. Mulroy, Cook County Circuit, 10th Subcircuit, June 21, 2019
- Tyria B. Walton, Cook County

Circuit, 1st Subcircuit, June 25, 2019

- Erin H. Antonietti, Cook County Circuit, 3rd Subcircuit, June 26, 2019

2. The following judges have retired:

- Hon. William P. Brady, Associate Judge, 23rd Circuit, June 30, 2019
- Hon. Janet m. Hormberg, Associate Judge, 20th Circuit, June 30, 2019

3. The terms of the following associate judges have expired:

- Hon. Jennifer L. Hightower, 3rd Circuit, June 30, 2019
- Hon. Patricia M. Logue, Cook County Circuit, June 30, 2019
- Hon. Kirk D. Schoenbein, 109th

Circuit, June 30, 2019

- Hon. Richard D. Schwind, Cook County Circuit, June 30, 2019
- Hon. Patricia Anne Vander Meulon-Walton, 9th Circuit, June 30, 2019
- Hon. Anthony W. Vaupel, 9th Circuit, June 30, 2019 ■