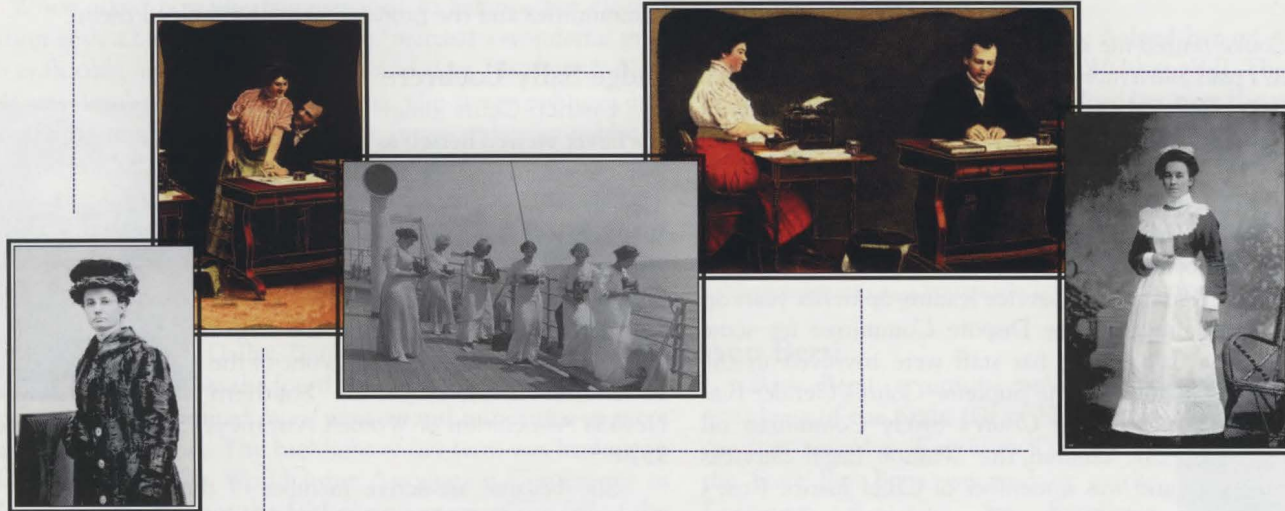


*Presenting*

*You've Come A Long Way Ladies*

WOMEN BAR LEADERS



[Ed. Note: During the State Bar of Nevada's 75th anniversary year, we will be focusing upon the lives and professional conduct of extraordinary lawyers such as those profiled below. Attorneys like these have demonstrated that dedication to the profession, and service to the community, can result in positive and permanent differences for the betterment of the legal community and society as a whole.]

University of Utah prepared Piscevich for being in the minority. In 1994, she became the first woman president of the State Bar of Nevada, a change that was well received.

"I didn't perceive any problems with having a woman as president of the bar," she says. "I think some people thought it was kind of cool."

Piscevich's term, which ended in June 1995, coincided with one of the most difficult times in Nevada's judicial history, due in large part to the Whitehead affair. "I'm proud of the leadership role I took at a difficult time," she says. "I tried to lead the bar to a position of utmost integrity."

After receiving her undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Utah, Piscevich clerked for Justice Henri Henroid of the Utah Supreme Court before returning to her native Nevada to pursue a legal career.

One of the biggest changes in the bar Piscevich notes is that new women attorneys can go directly from law school into private practice. "At that time, in order for a woman to get a job, she had to clerk for a judge or work in the public sector before she could go into private practice," Piscevich says. "That's not the trend today."

For her part, Piscevich worked as a Deputy Attorney General



Margo Piscevich

For almost 70 years, the ranks of bar leaders in Nevada were almost exclusively comprised of men. In recent years that tradition has given way, and many Nevada women attorneys have held leadership positions in state, local and national bar organizations. The first woman to serve on the State Bar Board of Governors was Janet Chubb from Reno. The first woman president was Margo Piscevich during the 1994-1995 term. She was followed by Franny Forsman. Ann Bersi served as president in 1999-2000 and Gloria Sturman is the current president, making her the fourth woman to hold the office in the 75-year history of the bar.

**Margo Piscevich**

At the time she was admitted to the bar in 1971, Margo Piscevich was one of less than a half dozen women practicing law in Reno. Being the only woman in her law school class at the

*continued on page 20*



## **Women Bar Leaders**

*continued from page 19*

in the Nevada Department of Highways for three years before practicing with the law firm of Hibbs and Newton. In 1978, she started her own practice, emphasizing insurance defense, personal injury, medical malpractice and employment law. Piscevich was the first woman elected to membership in the Reno Chapter of the American Board of Trial Advocates, membership that is based on a successful jury trial practice. When she was starting out, there was no formal mentoring system in place. "People who'd been around for awhile helped out, but most of it you just picked up on your own. And, I spent a lot of time in the law library."

"Tom Cooke rented me space in the little office upstairs on Court Street. I paid \$96 a month. He literally saved me," she said. "I wouldn't have had a place to go. He was the best supporter of young lawyers that I know." Cooke was a State Bar president and died in 1994.

Piscevich was first elected to the Board of Governors in 1990. She completed her Board service, including her presidency, in five years, the shortest tenure of any recent president. But, she had an impressive resume of bar service leading up to her years on the Board. She chaired the Fee Dispute Committee for some seven years in the days before bar staff were involved in the process. She was a member of the Supreme Court's Gender Bias Task Force and served on the Court's Study Committee on Lawyer Advertising. She chaired the Washoe Legal Services Board for four years and was a member of Chief Justice Rose's Urban Court Workload Assessment Commission. In addition to the State Bar, she is also a member of the Association of Defense Counsel of Nevada and Northern California, and is the only female member of the Reno Chapter of the American Board of Trial Advocates.

Aside from her work with the State Bar, Piscevich is involved in numerous law related organizations and commissions, including: Master of the American Inns of Court, Bruce Thompson Chapter, of which she was the first female president; Nevada Supreme Court Commission on Character and Fitness; Nevada Supreme Court Task Force on Gender Bias; Nevada Advisory Committee, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Chairman, 1990 to present; Nevada Trial Lawyers Association; International Association of Defense Counsel; Washoe County and American Bar Associations (ABA); and the Northern Nevada Women Lawyers Association. Piscevich was appointed to succeed Larry Hicks as the State Bar of Nevada's delegate to the ABA's House of Delegates.

She collects contemporary art and has served on the Nevada Museum of Art's Board of Directors. She is a member of the Nevada Arts Council, appointed by Gov. Miller and reappointed by Gov. Guinn. She has traveled in most of the world - Northern and Southern Africa, Mainland China, Russia, Australia, Europe and especially France because she has family there. She says that she's learned to travel successfully, to expect delays and just relax and go with it. "I find travel invigorating and rejuvenating." Piscevich says she is lucky to have a high energy level, not

requiring a lot of "down time." In fact, she said she wouldn't go back to Hawaii because it was just too laid back. "A hour of quiet is enough for me," she says. She is also a member of the Board of Trustees of the Great Reno Balloon Race.

On being the past president of the Bar, Piscevich states, "I am grateful for the opportunities being a lawyer has given me. Not only has it allowed me access to great people in the profession, including good friends, but the legal profession has given me opportunities to give back to the profession and my community. I would urge all lawyers to give back something to their communities and the profession that has helped them."

### **Judge Sally Loehrer**

District Court Judge Sally Loehrer has never viewed herself as a trailblazer for women attorneys, but her list of "firsts" indicates that she is one. This Milwaukee, Wis. native moved to Las Vegas in 1976, after graduating from Valparaiso Law School. She was among about 15 women attorneys in Las Vegas when she began practicing law in 1977. She was one of the 12 charter members of the Southern Nevada Association of Women Attorneys (SNAWA), formed in 1979.



**Judge Sally Loehrer**

She became an active member of the Clark County Bar Association (CCBA) in 1980 and later was the first woman to serve on CCBA's Board. She served for about five years with fellow attorneys Aubrey Goldberg, Paul Schofield, Stewart Bell and others. She was an active member of the CCBA continuing legal education committee for approximately ten years. In 1985 she became the first female CCBA President. Loehrer said that she never felt gender was a factor in her effectiveness during her years of CCBA service. As a member of the nominating committee for the CCBA, Loehrer recruited other women to serve on the Board. During her term as CCBA president, Loehrer was responsible for initiating the Pro Bono Project by procuring a grant from the ABA.

In 1979 she became the first woman Chief Deputy District Attorney, Family Support Division. She served in this position until 1984. After her stint with the DA's office, she served as an alternate Paternity and URESA Hearing Master and a Mental Commitment Hearing Master while practicing law with the firm of Wanderer and Wanderer. Since January 1993, Loehrer has served as a District Court Judge, Department XV.

### **Patricia Lynch**

Patricia Lynch is the current Reno City Attorney, which is an elected position. Lynch was first elected in 1987 and is now in her fifth term, a record in the City of Reno. She has also served as a deputy city attorney (Reno), a deputy Attorney General in the Department of Motor Vehicles Division, Legislative Assistant for Representative John Moss (D-CA) in the U.S. House of





Patricia Lynch

Representatives, a VISTA lawyer with Washoe Legal Services, and a volunteer lobbyist on the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1975 Nevada legislative session. She is one of the founders, and a past president of the Northern Nevada Women Lawyers Association.

Lynch followed an interest in government and politics. "I saw being a lawyer as the best way to bring about

change ... as a woman it was the best way to get power." She attended McGeorge on a scholarship, forming a women's caucus with the four other women students in her class.

When asked how she has managed to balance her elected position with a family, Lynch said she "married a wonderful man who is flexible and really pitches in and does his share." Also, while any legal position is demanding, she notes public sector jobs offer more regular hours: "For me it was either go public or leave the law," she says.

As the City of Reno is a member of the International Municipal Lawyers Association (IMLA), Lynch is active in the organization which has members representing over 1,400 cities and counties in the United States and Canada. In 1990 Lynch was recruited to serve on the Board of IMLA by the City Attorneys of Atlanta, Dallas, Boulder, and Neptune Beach, Fla., and in 1998-99 served as the fourth female president of IMLA. As president, Lynch recruited more women and minorities to serve on the Board of IMLA. The highlight of her term was leading an IMLA delegation to a World Jurist Association Conference in Budapest and Vienna for the 10th Anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain. As a member of the IMLA International Committee, Lynch has also traveled to WJA conferences in Kiev and Dublin to talk about local government law in emerging countries. She most recently traveled to Guadalajara for a joint meeting of the Canadian, United States, and Mexican city attorneys. "I have been fortunate to combine my interest in political science, my undergraduate degree, with my legal work, as there are dynamic changes in the world requiring expertise in establishing workable systems of government." Lynch is now working on some initiatives with Kabul, Afghanistan.

As a result of her work with IMLA, Lynch was recruited by Sholem Friedman, Chief of the Real Estate Division of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, to serve on the Council of the State and Local Government Law Section of the ABA. Last year, Lynch was elected Budget Officer for that Section and as a result is now a member of the Section Officer's Conference of the ABA.

Lynch is proudest of her Victim Witness Advocate Program and her office's approach to domestic violence. The City Attorney's office vigorously prosecutes domestic violence cases and has victim advocates on staff who help prepare victims for the case. "Domestic violence is the leading cause of death and injury to women," she says, and her program's goal is to break the cycle of violence. "This program helps victims start the journey from being a victim to being a survivor."

Over the years, several episodes have served as reminders

that Lynch is one of a relatively small number of women serving as City Attorney in larger municipalities. Once she was listening to a man rave about having to put up with a woman prosecutor in Municipal Court. "He went on and on, and then I said to him nicely, "I'm sorry sir, but wait until you see the judge," which happened to be Robin Wright. In a similar instance, a man called the City Attorney's Office to complain about a decision the U.S. Supreme Court had just announced holding that private clubs couldn't exclude women from their membership. Apparently, he thought the Reno City Attorney could take action. "It really pushed him over the edge when my secretary had to interrupt his tirade with "I'm sorry, sir, she's not in." He obviously was hoping to find a sympathetic (male) ear. "I did call him later and we ended up laughing about it."

Besides the mentors who have helped her on the national level, Lynch is grateful to Steve Walther, Bill Thornton, and Frankie Sue Del Papa who have helped her over the years. "Steve got me appointed to the Nevada Advisory Committee to the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights when I was a Legal Aid lawyer, and I hadn't even met him yet! Bill has been a wonderful supporter in helping me maneuver through the political arena in Reno and Frankie Sue opened up doors to work on domestic violence issues on a statewide level and national level."

### Ann Bersi

Ann Bersi is unique among past presidents of the State Bar of Nevada, as she first served as Executive Director of the State Bar. Bersi was working as the Executive Assistant for Employee Relations for then Governor Robert List when she met Judge Melvin Brunetti, the Governor's legal counsel. Judge Brunetti was also a member of the Board of Governors of the State Bar of Nevada.



Ann Bersi

When the State Bar was looking for a new Executive Director, Judge Brunetti suggested Bersi apply for the position. It was a timely suggestion, as Richard Bryan had been elected Governor, and Ann predicted that she would be without a job in the new administration.

Although Bersi had administrative experience, she knew nothing about the practice of law. At the time, she was one of the few non-attorneys to serve as executive director of a mandatory state bar. When Bersi joined the State Bar, she managed a staff of six. During her eight-year tenure, membership grew to more than 4,000 and the budget reached \$1 million.

Bersi learned about the regulation of the legal profession on the job from several mentors. Judge Brunetti was a very active president, who attended ABA meetings in order to collect "good ideas" to bring back to Nevada. Bersi learned about attorney ethics and the discipline process from Dennis Kennedy, then chair of the Discipline Board. Bersi admires his commitment to lawyer ethics and has tried to emulate his example in her own practice as an attorney. Bersi cites Tom Cooke as the attorney who taught her the most about the role of the State Bar in

*continued on page 22*



## Women Bar Leaders

continued from page 21

governing the profession. Cooke was a Past President, but he also chaired the Client Security Fund and was very committed to the role of the fund. Cooke played a key role in obtaining an increase in the portion of each member's dues that would go to support the Clients' Security Fund. Cooke eloquently argued that contributing to the Fund is an obligation that all members of the State Bar owe not only to their profession, but also to the public.

As Bersi learned more about the legal profession, she decided she wanted to join the lawyers she respected as a colleague. When Bersi graduated from California Western School of Law, she added a "J.D." to her already impressive resume, which includes a B.A. and M.A. in English Literature from San Diego State University, and a Ph.D. from the University of Connecticut in Higher Education Administration.

Even before Bersi was admitted to the State Bar of Nevada in 1992 she knew she wanted to serve on the Board of Governors. When she was first elected in 1993 she had not considered running for President, but at the urging of her colleagues on the Board she did so, and served as President for the 1999-2000 term. Bersi believes that she was able to make a successful transition from Bar Executive to Bar President because she made a conscious effort to never say "when I was the Bar Executive, we did it this way . . ." Having viewed the operations of the Board of Governors from the perspective of both a staff person and a member, she believes that the most effective members did not attempt to promote their own agenda, but rather listened to the debate, and then stepped in to help the group reach consensus. Bersi believes that way the State Bar can most effectively promote a positive image of the profession is through community service projects. During her term as president local and specialty bar associations were invited to apply for grants for such programs.

Bersi is employed as a Deputy District Attorney for Clark County. In her spare time, she is an avid horsewoman, and enjoys riding the Nevada, Utah, and Arizona mountain and desert trails. Bersi is still active in bar activities, as she is currently serving as an appointee to the Judicial Selection Commission.

### Bonnie A. Bulla

Bonnie A. Bulla is a member of the Las Vegas office of Broening Oberg et al, and practices primarily in medical malpractice, professional negligence, and civil trial practice. She was admitted in 1987 to the State Bar of Nevada and U.S. District Court, District of Nevada following her graduation from Law School at Arizona State University where she was also an undergraduate and received her B.S. Bulla was the first Nevada woman attorney to hold an elected position in the ABA.

Bulla's mentors in ABA activities were Von Heinz and Kathleen England. Heinz and England impressed on Bulla the importance of becoming involved in your profession outside of your day-to-day work responsibilities, in order to become a well-rounded attorney. Bulla enjoyed her exposure to national issues, as all too often we focus on our own community, and lose

perspective of issues others face. After several years of working in the Young Lawyers Division of the ABA, Bulla was elected Assembly Speaker in 1997-1998. Her election marked the first time a Nevada lawyer held an elected position in

the ABA. Having broken that barrier, Bulla was immediately followed in that same office by another Nevadan, Rew Goodenow, which provided phenomenal exposure for the State of Nevada at a national level. The Assembly Speaker is charged with running the midyear and annual meetings of the Young Lawyers Division. After her term, she then served as the ABA Young Lawyers Division Liaison to the Tort and Insurance Practice Section, 1999-2000.

Bulla says, "the most important aspect of becoming involved in bar activities at a national level is that it allows you to learn from other lawyers about resources which not only assist you in your practice, but with outreach to your community." Bulla learned that many communities faced similar problems, and had developed programs to assist the public, some of which she implemented in Nevada. In particular Bulla recalls learning about the Goldilocks program, which teaches school children about American trial process, by acting out the trial of Goldilocks for "breaking and entering" at the Three Bears' House. They also implemented Ask-A-Lawyer programs in local malls for Law Day. Bulla particularly enjoyed the YLD emphasis on public service. Although Bulla remains a member of the ABA, she is not as involved now, but has stayed in touch with the lifelong friends she made as a Young Lawyer.

Bulla is also a member of the CCBA; Nevada Trial Lawyers Association; The Association of Trial Lawyers of America (Associate Member, 1993-); Defense Research Institute (Member, 1996-); American Inn of Court (Barrister, 1992-1998); and SNAWA (President, 1989-1990). Although the time constraints of her busy practice do not allow her to maintain her previous level of involvement, she is grateful for her experience in the YLD. "I came to recognize the value of lawyers in our society, and to realize what a tremendous gift it is to be a lawyer. Involvement in bar activities at a national level shows you the value of the role of lawyers in American society."

### Gloria J. Sturman

Gloria Sturman is a partner with the Las Vegas firm of Edwards, Hale, Sturman, Atkin & Cushing, Ltd. She practices primarily in insurance defense law, personal injury litigation, civil



Pictured (l) to (r): Toya Cook, Future YLD, Assembly Clerk and Speaker; Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton; Bonnie A. Bulla





Gloria J. Sturman

rights and employment law and serves on the firm's three-member management committee. She is the current president of the State Bar of Nevada and earned her bachelor's and law degrees from Arizona State University.

Sturman served as president of the CCBA in 1994, and was then elected to the Board of Governors of the State Bar of Nevada. She has followed in footsteps of

prior CCBA presidents who then served as President of the State Bar, including Bob Dickerson, Dan Polsenberg, and John Mowbray. Since Sturman was only the third woman President of the CCBA, and the fourth woman President of the State Bar of Nevada, she is the first woman to hold both positions.

Sturman believes that the best path for a young attorney who is interested in bar leadership is through local and specialty bar associations. As a member of SNAWA, she was encouraged by Carolyn Ellsworth and Sally Loerher to run for President, and was elected to the 1988-1989 term. Loerher then nominated her to the CCBA Board of Directors, where she served her first term under the dynamic leadership of that organization's second woman president Nancy Oesterle. She recalls meeting the women who were later to be her mentors at SNAWA's annual New Admittee Brunch, held the Saturday after she was admitted to the State Bar of Nevada.

Sturman predicts that since the number of women in law schools has now surpassed the number of men, women bar leaders will be the norm in the future. Indeed, two women who are also past presidents of the CCBA are currently serving on the Board of Governors, Nancy Allf, and Dara Goldsmith, along with Bridget Robb Peck, past president of the Washoe County Bar Association.

Sturman notes that voluntary bar associations focus on member and public service, while the Board of Governors must

balance the core functions of admissions and discipline with the differing needs of its members and the public throughout a very diverse state. Andrew Puccinelli, who represented the Rural Counties on the Board of Governors and was President in 1999-2000, was a tireless advocate for his constituents and always reminded the Board of Governors of the need to think about every issue as it affects members statewide. He started the tradition of holding one Board meeting per year in a "rural" area of Nevada, and hosted the group for several years at his home in Elko. However, it was President John Mowbray's "presidential tour" to meet the attorneys practicing in the rural areas of the State that provided outreach to all our members. The Board hopes the tour will be repeated on a regular basis. Another mentor was Coe Swobe, one of the founders of Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers who helped the Board realize the need to reach out to members in crisis, as each of our members is a valuable resource.

Sturman is also a member of the ABA, State Bar of Arizona, SNAWA, and has served on the boards of the Frontier Girl Scout Council and the Las Vegas-Clark County Library District. ■

Compiled by Nevada Lawyer staff from articles in Nevada Lawyer, July 1994 and Communiqué, Feb. 1998 issues along with personal interviews.

# STATE BAR OF NEVADA



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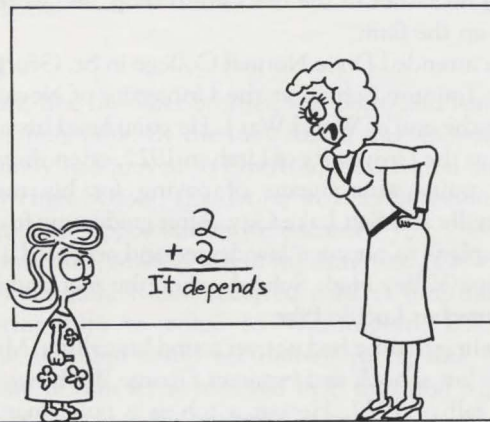
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