



# THE HISTORY OF THE DALLAS WOMEN LAWYERS ASSOCIATION

*Celebrating 50 Years - 1969 - 2019*



## FOREWORD BY DENA DENOOYER STROH

Dallas Women Lawyers Association (DWLA) originated at a time in our legal profession when women could graduate from law school but had almost no job prospects, regardless of qualifications. Indeed, during the late 1970s, women law students at Southern Methodist University School of Law (SMU Law) filed suit against several major law firms in Dallas for discriminatory hiring. Even the redoubtable Louise Raggio, one of DWLA's founders who served as the first female Assistant District Attorney for Dallas County (for half the pay of her male colleagues), was later told by District Attorney Henry Wade that he only hired her to get Judge Sarah T. Hughes off his back.

When you look backward to view DWLA through the lens of the present, you can see where the organization is going. The 50-year journey of DWLA starts with a group of women lawyers meeting informally who were staunchly independent from the Dallas Bar Association (DBA), and ends with the DWLA being welcomed into the fold of the DBA with a voting seat on the DBA's Board of Directors and official recognition as the bar association in Dallas that represents the interests of women lawyers. There is an implicit understanding that we all need to work together to attain what all diverse lawyers are seeking: to be treated with respect and to have equal opportunity in the legal profession.

**"We all win when we work together."**

**Justice Carolyn Wright**

## DALLAS WOMEN LAWYERS: THE BEGINNING

In the mid-1960s, a handful of Dallas women attorneys, including Sarah T. Hughes, Louise Raggio, and Joann Peters, began meeting at the Adolphus Hotel (where the DBA met) once a month for lunch. This informal network of women lawyers was small but tight-knit. According to Louise Raggio, “we would have lunch together and cry on each other’s shoulders about discrimination and about challenges we had because we were female.” In addition to supporting each other as women lawyers, this group began meeting regularly in 1968 to prepare programs for the upcoming 1969 American Bar Association (ABA) Convention annual meeting in Dallas.

In conjunction with the ABA meeting, the National Association of Women Lawyers (NAWL), an organization founded in 1899, held its own three-day convention. The Dallas women hosted about 40 women lawyers from around the country. NAWL was large enough to justify arranging a chartered bus tour around Dallas, and Joann Peters served as tour guide to places like Southern Methodist University and Highland Park Village.

Buoyed by the success of the 1969 meeting and strengthened by their friendships, the women continued informal monthly meetings after the convention ended. This unofficial group chose to stay behind the scenes so that the male-dominated Dallas Bar would not deny leadership roles to women lawyers; as Raggio described:

We were a group without a constitution, officers, dues, bylaws, or any other form of official organization because we did not want to give the Dallas Bar Association any reason to exclude us from participation and leadership in the Big Bar. We knew if we had a women’s organization, it would give men a perfect excuse to say, “Well you’ve got your own organization, so you don’t need us.” So we were very low key.... We were covert and undercover, bringing the attention of the community to the endless list of discriminatory practices against women. We got the credit or blame for lots of things, some of which we did and some of which never occurred to us.

This small network of women lawyers made a big difference. By regularly keeping in contact, the women were able to exchange information on job opportunities, discuss legislative changes, encourage more female candidates for the judiciary and public offices, and generally advance women’s interests. They helped younger women lawyers secure some of the few jobs available to women. According to Raggio, “We celebrated each woman’s victory. When there was a breakthrough of any kind, it was an occasion for joy. Every victory, no matter how small it seemed initially, was a breakthrough to something more significant.”

## WOMEN LAWYERS ON THE RISE

As this network of women lawyers coalesced into what would later officially become the DWLA, one of their most important priorities during the 1960s was legislative reform to address gender discrimination in Texas law. Louise Raggio, in particular, led the charge for legislative reform. As Chair of the State Bar Family Law Section, Raggio initially focused her efforts on the Texas Marital Property Act, as “Texas had the worst laws in the whole United States—discriminatory—especially toward married women.” Raggio explained, “Basically, when a man and woman married, they said the husband and wife are one. And he was the one.” Married women could not sign a contract, file a lawsuit, or get a bank loan without the approval of their husbands and had the same legal status as “infants, idiots, and felons.” It took two years and seven full drafts, but by 1967, Raggio had written an entirely new Marital Property Act. The landmark legislation transformed the rights of women in Texas and, for the first time, made it possible for married women, including married women lawyers, to enter into contracts, sign documents, and file lawsuits without their husbands’ permission.

By 1972, Dallas women lawyers from the informal “Adolphus group” had formed the “Committee for Women in Government.” The committee’s primary goal was to press for greater female representation in Dallas County courts. This put into action a common theme from Judge Hughes’s speech on “The Status of Women in the United States since World War II” in which she complained of women’s general reluctance to seek elected office and become involved in public affairs. The committee even had its own letterhead listing Judge Hughes as honorary chairman and Joann Peters as chairman with members including Louise Raggio, Edith DeBusk, Sue Goolsby, and Reba Graham Rasor.

The informal group of women lawyers pushing for change supported its efforts by “passing the hat” when money was needed, and everybody was generous according to Raggio. The “backbone” of the group included experienced women lawyers such as Louise Raggio, Adelfa Callejo, Margaret Brand Smith, Norma Beasley, Lillian Edwards, Linda Coffee, and, less directly, Sarah T. Hughes, who by that time was a federal judge. These experienced women lawyers were determined to ensure the next generation of women lawyers were afforded opportunities that they had been denied.

**“In the 60s, all of the women lawyers could meet assembled around one table in the old headquarters in the Adolphus Hotel. This was before the word ‘networking’ but that’s what we did.”  
Louise Raggio**

## LITIGATION RESULTS IN “BIG LAW” EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR DALLAS WOMEN LAWYERS

As the legislative reforms of the 1960s (including passage of the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Equal Rights Act of 1964) began to take effect, striking down some of the barriers facing women lawyers, more women decided to pursue the law as a career. In 1969, just 6.9 percent of law students were women; in 1979, that figure had risen to 31.4%.

Women lawyers in Dallas continued efforts to make the law a career where women could thrive, and that included pursuing litigation. In 1975, five female law students from SMU Law who were denied summer clerkships in favor of male students with inferior grades filed suit against the would-be-employer law firms. At the time, not a single large law firm in the city had a female attorney on its staff. Barbara Lynn, who currently serves as the Chief Federal District Judge for the Northern District of Texas, was one of those five students. She recalled: “[w]e had this crazy idea that if we worked hard, did well in law school and demonstrated our skills, that we would get job offers. We noticed that men who graduated well below several of the women in our class were getting offers while those same law firms were ignoring the female law students.”

In the end, four of the five firms settled and soon had women lawyers on their payrolls. The result was a big step forward for women lawyers but came with a price. The five female students who sued were labeled “troublemakers,” and some had to leave Texas in order to secure jobs and realize their potential as attorneys. By contrast, Barbara Lynn thrived as the first woman lawyer hired at Carrington Coleman, where she had the support, mentorship, and championship of Jim Coleman who was, as she put it, “the original feminist.”

**“The legal profession is a great profession to do a lot of good for a lot of people, but there are a lot of bumps along the way.”**

**Chief Judge Barbara Lynn**

## GROWTH AND PROGRESS

In 1984, 15 years after the ABA and NAWL conferences in 1969 and after the women lawyers began regularly meeting around a single table at the Adolphus Hotel, DWLA was formally (and finally) incorporated, united by the goal of the advancement of women in the legal profession and beyond. The original reason for hiding the group's existence—that the male leaders of the DBA would be less likely to give leadership opportunities to women lawyers—had been resolved; after years of women running for the Dallas Bar Board, a woman lawyer was elected as a director. Indeed, in 1985, Harriet Miers served as the first female DBA President.

The nineties brought both divisive uncertainty and great achievements to DWLA. In the early 1990s, DWLA's leaders strived for DWLA to be taken seriously by the DBA. At the time, the Dallas Bar Association's membership form allowed a new or renewing member who indicated membership in a "minority bar association" to obtain a discount on Dallas Bar dues. DWLA members would write in DWLA and thus obtain a discount on Dallas Bar dues. Within a few years, however, the DBA's membership form changed to identify specific minority bar associations, though not DWLA. DWLA leaders then began to seek an ex-officio seat for DWLA on the Dallas Bar Board.

Recognizing that the increased influence and inclusion of women attorneys reflected the tireless efforts of many people, DWLA established the Louise B. Raggio Award in 1992 to honor those efforts. DWLA awarded the first Louise Raggio award to Barbara Lynn, and Sarah Weddington (plaintiff's counsel in *Roe v. Wade*) gave the keynote speech at DWLA's annual membership brunch where the award was presented. DWLA has now presented the Louise Raggio award to more than two dozen worthy recipients, each promoting the development of women lawyers.

In 1994, DWLA celebrated its 25th anniversary and continued to expand its supportive network. DWLA teamed with SMU Law's Women in Law to host the first "Women Inspiring Women" breakfast reception, an event including lawyers at all levels, from those still studying to get their licenses to seasoned practitioners.

Another opportunity also emerged for DWLA to stand with other women lawyers: the representatives of several local women's bar associations from across the state created Texas Women Lawyers, an organization formed "to promote the interests of women in the legal profession" and "to improve the condition of all women."



The progress of women in the legal field truly seemed to be on the uptick; a record number of women from both political parties ran for judge in Dallas County in 1994, raising the possibility of women having a greater judicial presence. Unfortunately, Dallas voters weren't there yet. Women ultimately realized a net loss of two judicial seats in Dallas County.

The very next year, 1995, marked a historic event for all American women: the 75th anniversary of the passage of the 19th amendment giving women the right to vote in the United States. DWLA celebrated this momentous occasion at its Mentoring Spring Celebration co-sponsored by DWLA and SMU Law's Women in Law. The master of ceremonies pointed out that the Dallas Morning News had reported that a male federal judge prohibited women attorneys from using "Ms." or their maiden names in his courtroom as recently as the late eighties. When a woman lawyer's male co-counsel raised the point that her clients would not know her by any other name, the judge cited him for contempt, accompanied by 30 days in jail. Despite progress, much work still remained.

In September 1995, DWLA adopted a resolution underscoring its commitment to the success of women lawyers: "The DWLA endorses the efforts of law firms, corporations, partnerships, unincorporated businesses, and government entities aimed at increasing the numbers of women of all races employed at all levels as attorneys. This includes efforts to increase the hiring, promotion, and retention of women as attorneys, and efforts to increase the salary levels of women attorneys."

DWLA did not slow its efforts in 1996. In response to requests for information about local law firms controlled or owned by women, DWLA published a directory of those firms, with a view to generating client referrals. Any female lawyer who joined DWLA could have her firm's information published in the directory. DWLA also added an apprenticeship program to its existing mentoring program that fostered the growth of law students. The apprenticeship program furthered the professional development of young member lawyers (licensed less than five years) by matching them with senior attorneys who could provide advice and guidance. Through the apprenticeship program, DWLA sought to respond to evidence that women were leaving the legal profession due to a lack of apprenticeship and lack of training in courtroom technique. This new program, formally launched in 1997, confirmed DWLA's commitment to strengthening the standing of women lawyers.

**"I came along in the day where sometimes you had to take male partners to court with you so that the judges would take you seriously."**

**Kim Askew**

## DWLA AT A CROSSROADS

Despite its positive strides, DWLA began to question its purpose and very existence as the decade progressed. DWLA had previously lent its support to seemingly like-minded organizations, such as Texas Women Lawyers. But by the end of 1996, DWLA leadership began to reconsider its involvement in these organizations due to identity confusion and disparate missions. A few months later, at its meeting in January 1997, DWLA leadership concluded that it would continue to list Texas Women Lawyers on the DWLA application but with an explanation that TWL is a separate organization that DWLA supports.

In late 1997, DWLA considered whether it would be in DWLA's best interests to pursue becoming a section of the Dallas Bar Association. If adopted, this measure would mean the dissolution of DWLA as an independent entity. This question became increasingly contentious in 1998, dividing the organization over DWLA's structure and objectives. On August 6, 1998, members voted for DWLA to become a section of the Dallas Bar Association. Multiple DWLA members challenged the vote, claiming lack of proper notice and violation of DWLA's formation documents. They also objected to alleged statements at the meeting that the measure was approved by past DWLA presidents when, in fact, it was not. Certain members, including founder Louise Raggio, signed a joint letter to the DWLA President and President-Elect, formally challenging the vote as invalid based upon misrepresentations to the DWLA membership on key issues and failure to comply with certain provisions of the DWLA Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation.

DWLA leadership acted upon the outcry and invited all interested parties to attend the upcoming board meeting on September 10, 1998 to discuss DWLA's future. At the meeting, the membership received additional details about the contemplated dissolution of DWLA as a tax-exempt entity and merger with DBA as a section. By the conclusion of the meeting, the Board agreed to abide by the existing Bylaws and to obtain a professional opinion regarding the treatment of DWLA funds if it was dissolved as a separate 501(c)(6) entity. DWLA leadership also made clear that, at its option, it could proceed to discuss the issue with the DBA Board.

In October 1998, Louise Raggio prominently stepped into the conversation by sending a memo to DWLA leadership regarding the tension over the future of DWLA. She dispelled any notion that she had approved the purported vote on August 6, 1998 but applauded the President and President-Elect for "inject[ing] enthusiasm and vigor into the organization." She added historical perspective to the interaction between the DBA and DWLA: "Women lawyers had no voice in DBA leadership in the 50s and 60s. DWLA was started to fill that need, and we ran a 'sacrificial lamb' each year for director. All of us were defeated, until finally either Harriet Miers or Dee Miller broke the barrier and was elected director." She emphasized that DWLA, at its roots, was about community, mentorship, and giving women attorneys a voice where they had none. On these grounds, among others, she objected to the "dismantling of DWLA independence" necessary to become a section of the DBA. She ended her memo with suggestions for the future of DWLA (including determining why women lawyers are not DWLA members, creating programs for women lawyers who are not actively practicing, and reducing DWLA dues).



## AFTER THE DUST SETTLED

Although consumed by indecision for much of 1998, DWLA maintained business as usual in 1999 with a focus on community involvement and CLE opportunities for its members. DWLA did not become a DBA section in 1998 or 1999, but the question was not dead. In 2000, DWLA's officers officially sought DBA permission for DWLA to become a section of the Dallas Bar Association. Under its guidelines for becoming a section, the DBA required the DWLA to submit 50 letters from DBA members stating an intent to join DWLA and 35 letters from DBA members stating that they had attended at least three DWLA meetings. They complied. Even so, DWLA heard the bad news in August 2000: the DBA denied DWLA's request to become a DBA section because DWLA "was not a substantive law section."

This existential crisis – whether to become a Dallas Bar section – had a strong impact on DWLA. Indeed, in 2002, DWLA's Board questioned whether DWLA even needed to exist and sent a survey to DWLA's membership, asking whether DWLA was obsolete. Answers were mixed. This led to an aura of uncertainty, which is reflected in DWLA's membership numbers, which dwindled to less than 100 paying members in the 2000s.

## DWLA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Though DWLA leadership had contemplated becoming a section of DBA, 2001 debuted with a renewed commitment to DWLA as an independent organization. President Norma Shirk had two major goals for the year: revising the bylaws and improving DWLA's online presence. DWLA increased the use of its website and moved to electronic communication in 2005, bringing DWLA forward as a 21st century organization.

Having prioritized obtaining CLE credit for DWLA meetings during the 1990s, DWLA's CLE program in the 2000s had two broader goals: (1) to provide educational opportunities specific to the challenges faced by women lawyers; and (2) to create a platform for women lawyers to present to the Dallas legal community. DWLA sought to empower women by presenting topics unique to women lawyers and focusing on giving women the stage. For example, in 2001, Rani Garcia presented "Breastfeeding and the Working Mother: A Legal Perspective." Other CLE topics included strategic planning for the woman lawyer, marketing to women clients, maternity leave policies, law firm retention of women attorneys, and gender bias in litigation. Women lawyers and judges (in the Dallas community and beyond) were presenters at almost every DWLA CLE. In November 2003, for example, DWLA presented a judicial panel with Judges Catharina Haynes, Barbara Lynn, Lisa Green, and Frances Ann Harris. In October, University of Houston Law School Dean Nancy Rappaport gave a presentation on "How Lawyers are Depicted in the Media."

## RISING TOGETHER: SUPPORTING WOMEN LAWYERS IN DALLAS

DWLA continued hosting its annual Judicial Reception as an opportunity to promote and recognize exceptional women lawyers in the Dallas community by awarding the Louise B. Raggio Award to a deserving recipient. DWLA also recognized women trailblazers by co-hosting the dedication of a historical marker for Louise Raggio and contributing to the reception honoring Eva Guzman, the first Latina to serve on the Texas Supreme Court when she was elected in 2010.

DWLA also created several successful new programs that allow women lawyers to help other women lawyers, including Mentoring Circles, a joint project with the Dallas Association of Young Lawyers (DAYL). Mentoring Circles connects young women lawyers with experienced women attorneys by forming small groups of young and experienced women attorneys. Topics for the Mentoring Circles' monthly meetings have ranged from business development to communication styles, as well as addressing other challenges the mentees may be facing. In addition, quarterly events have included a panel discussion with prominent women attorneys in Dallas and their mentors, a networking skills event, and business development from a woman's perspective.

The DWLA/DAYL Mentoring Circles program received a State Bar of Texas Star of Achievement Award in a ceremony on June 22, 2017. The chair of the program that year, Gemma Descoteaux, said of Mentoring Circles:



## SUPPORTING WOMEN LAW STUDENTS

In 2000, while 47% of law students in law schools were women, women comprised only 28.9% of lawyers in the United States. Recognizing that women needed more support transitioning into the legal profession, DWLA turned its efforts to encouraging women law students at SMU Law. In 2002, DWLA gave a non-voting DWLA Board seat to a member of SMU Law's Women in Law student organization. By 2008, DWLA had agreed to waive dues for members of SMU Law's Women in Law and dues were reduced to \$10 for other law students. Board member Sloan Rawlins suggested starting a scholarship program for women law students in September 2004, and, by 2009, the Board began designing criteria for the scholarship award. In 2012, DWLA established a bar study scholarship for female law students at SMU Law, Texas Wesleyan University School of Law (now Texas A&M Law), and later UNT Law. Since 2012, these scholarships have helped to relieve the financial burden of the bar exam for scholarship recipients, enabling them to perform to their best potential.

DWLA implemented a new Leadership Class program in 2015, designed for women law students to help become integrated into the legal community. DWLA selects class members based on demonstration of leadership potential and a commitment to the advancement of women in the profession. The Leadership Class program introduces the class to effective legal leaders, develops their leadership skills, and provides unique networking opportunities to position the women for success in the legal profession. DWLA has put together successful leadership classes each year since the program's inception.

**"By providing training and resources for the next generation of leading female lawyers, we help bridge the gap and set the tone for women's equality. When women support and encourage other women, we all become better leaders and advocates equipped to effectuate change."**

**Lindsey Wyrick**

## WOMEN ELEVATING WOMEN NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY

Throughout the 2000s, DWLA encouraged its membership to take an active leadership role in the legal community, not only within its ranks but also in other bar and professional associations. DWLA continued to stay involved with other women's organizations including its membership in the Dallas Women's Coalition and the National Conference of Women's Bar Associations. For example, in 2004, Lee Baldwin was the only Texas delegate to the National Conference of Women's Bar Associations, which assisted in establishing women's bar associations where none existed and had its own voting member in the ABA House of Delegates. Other members of DWLA were also taking prominent roles: Rani Garcia served as DWLA's liaison with the Texas Supreme Court Gender Fairness Task Force, and Litsa Papanicolaou was appointed to the Dallas Women's Coalition. DWLA co-sponsored a brunch for the Texas State Bar Women in the Law Section Annual Meeting.

DWLA also embraced opportunities to elevate international women lawyers. In 2003, the Center for Citizens Initiative approached DWLA with a unique opportunity when the Russian Women Lawyer Delegation visited Dallas for two weeks. DWLA members served as ambassadors for this delegation of women lawyers from Russia. In recognition of the Russian Women Lawyer's project, DWLA received an Honorable Mention for the 2004 Public Service Award presented by the National Conference of Women's Bar Associations. On March 5, 2005, DWLA co-hosted a reception honoring Her Excellency Faïda Mififu, Ambassador of the Democratic Republic of Congo to the United States. The reception, which was held at the home of Donna and Stephen Malouf, raised approximately \$40,000 for various Congolese charities, including a center for rape victims, various hospitals, and Women for Women International.

**"If women don't help other women, who's going to do it?"**

**Kathryn Veech**

## SISTER BARS BANDING TOGETHER

Through its renewed focus on forging strong ties with other local area legal groups and associations, DWLA hoped to earn greater standing within the Dallas legal community at large, more on par with the other sister bar associations. In the interest of greater integration and recognition within the Dallas legal community, DWLA sought first, to gain greater formal influence on sister bar boards and, second, to build more informal ties with sister bars through networking, cross-sponsorship opportunities, and social events.

DWLA's informal influence campaign with sister bars was a sustained effort that took many forms. DWLA maintained its commitment to pro bono and charitable efforts. Misty Ventura served on the Legal Services of North Texas Board on DWLA's behalf, and DWLA continued to staff pro bono clinics at Legal Aid's Martin Luther King Center. DWLA also partnered on new projects with sister bar organizations. For example, in 2003, it joined with the DAYL to support the Maternity Closet, a project designed to ease the burden on working moms by loaning maternity business attire to fellow lawyer mothers-to-be. In 2004, DWLA co-sponsored an end-of-year social with the Dallas Black Women Attorneys, with contributions going to Jonathan's Place, a shelter for abused children. Earsa Jackson and Karen McCloud attended a Frisco Rough Riders game with Jonathan's Place children, who received baseball caps and were thrilled to enjoy America's favorite pastime. On August 25, 2005, DWLA gave a career presentation to the residents of Our Friends Place, a non-profit organization that provides supportive and transitional living resources for young women, ages 18-24, in the Dallas area.

In 2010, DWLA started sponsoring DBA's Bar None, a fundraiser benefitting Sarah T. Hughes Diversity Scholarships at local area law schools. DWLA organized a sister bar social to attend the Bar None performance with the Dallas Asian American Bar Association (DAABA), DAYL, Dallas Hispanic Bar Association (DHBA), and J.L. Turner Legal Association (J.L. Turner). In 2012, DWLA again joined up with DAABA, DHBA and J.L. Turner for a CLE called "Building Your Personal Brand." To end 2012 on a fun note, DWLA joined DAABA and J.L. Turner for a night of karaoke where the presidents of the organizations gave memorable performances of Michael Jackson's "Thriller" and FloRida's "Low." There was an encore karaoke night in 2013. That year, DWLA also came out in force, and in costume, for Mayhem on McKinney, a sister-bar social and networking Halloween party.

These efforts, and many more, paid off. By cultivating stronger relationships with sister bars over time, DWLA was gaining greater recognition as a minority sister bar on par with the other organizations. For example, DWLA strengthened its relationship with DAYL when DAYL created a non-voting seat for DWLA on its Board of Directors in November 2002. In 2010, DWLA's non-voting seat on DAYL's Board was converted to a voting seat.

In 2014, the Dallas Diversity Task Force invited DWLA to participate as a sponsoring entity. Started in 2006 by DHBA in partnership with J.L. Turner and DAABA, the Diversity Task Force issues annual "Law Firm Diversity Reports," analyzing the recruitment, retention, and promotion of minority attorneys at Dallas's largest law firms. In 2014, the Diversity Task Force expanded its analysis, for the first time, to include women and LGBTQ attorneys as recognized minority groups. DWLA has been proud to be included in this important work. The 2014 Law Firm Diversity Report found that women made up 35.33% of all associates and non-equity partners at the large Dallas firms surveyed and 16.89% of all equity partners at those firms. The 2015 and 2016 Diversity Reports showed similar results. The percentage of women attorneys (as well as the percentage of attorneys of color and LGBTQ attorneys) at the large Dallas firms surveyed had remained essentially stagnant as of 2016, showing that the legal community has more work to do.

Despite these activities though, DWLA did not have any formal representation in the Dallas Bar Association's Board. In 2002, out of the ten nominations for DBA's Board, Kelly Harrington was the only woman nominated and elected to the DBA Board. In 2003, DWLA worked with DBA President Brian Melton to explore ways to strengthen the relationship between DBA and DWLA. In 2008, the DWLA Board reopened a discussion regarding DWLA's affiliation with the Dallas Bar Association. In 2011, DWLA's President and President-Elect started discussing DWLA's inclusion on the DBA's membership form with DBA's President. DWLA fostered that relationship by donating to the DBA New Member Reception, co-sponsoring the DBA Minority Clerk Happy Hour, contributing funds to the Belo Mansion Expansion project, and regularly contributing to DBA's Equal Access to Justice campaign. Still, DWLA's role in DBA was not yet that of an official sister bar.

**"DWLA has drawn the support necessary to be heard, and we have drawn this support by educating our supporters on the facts and disparate treatment of women in our profession."**

**Nicole Knox**

## DWLA GETS A SEAT AT THE TABLE

DWLA's continued pursuit of formal recognition by the Dallas Bar Association with a voting seat on DBA's Board culminated in September 2015 when DWLA moved decisively towards this goal by passing a "Resolution of the Dallas Women Lawyers Association for Inclusion as a Minority Bar Organization within the Dallas Bar Association." Through this resolution, DWLA formally requested that the DBA recognize DWLA as a "minority bar organization" and give DWLA a voice for women on the DBA Board of Directors on par with J.L. Turner, DHBA, DAABA, and DAYL, all sister bar associations with one voting and one nonvoting seat on DBA's Board.

At the end of 2015, DBA's Board formed an ad hoc committee to consider DWLA's request for board representation. After several lively board meetings, the DBA Board voted to recommend to the Dallas Bar membership at the annual meeting that DWLA obtain two non-voting seats on the DBA Board. On November 4, 2016, the Dallas Bar Association's membership voted to grant DWLA two ex-officio Advisory Director positions on the DBA Board of Directors and to include DWLA on the DBA dues statement membership application beginning in 2017. This vote meant that after years as an independent (yet often marginalized organization), DWLA would have a seat at the table with the promise that the DBA would endeavor to later convert one of the non-voting seats into a voting seat on the DBA Board.

DWLA would not have to wait long to realize its ultimate goal: to be treated as a co-equal sister bar organization with a voting seat on the DBA's Board of Directors. On October 19, 2017, the DBA's Board voted unanimously to give a voting director's position to DWLA in lieu of the two ex-officio positions DWLA had held the year before. DWLA's 2016 President Angela Zambrano commented on the significance of the vote, saying, "It ensures that female lawyers' voices are heard in the governance of our profession in Dallas. It recognizes that women lawyers are a minority in every courtroom and every boardroom where we appear. Although, thankfully, there have been women on the DBA Board for many years, these women were not charged with looking out for the rest of the women lawyers in Dallas. Now we have someone to do that."

The same day as the DBA Board vote, DWLA hosted its Annual Awards Reception, where DWLA President Dena DeNooyer Stroh had the privilege of announcing the result of the historic DBA vote in DWLA's favor. "The esteemed Louise B. Raggio (one of DWLA's founders) argued for independence," DeNooyer Stroh said. "Through the unanimous vote by the Dallas Bar Board, both of these objectives have been achieved: continued independence and full recognition by the Dallas Bar Board as the organization that represents women lawyers."

## THE FUTURE

Although DWLA has finally achieved its long-term goal of a voting seat on the DBA Board, DWLA is not resting on its laurels. In 2018, DWLA created a new non-profit entity dedicated to supporting charitable giving to empower and support women in the legal profession. The Dallas Women Lawyers Association Foundation seeks to be the vehicle through which the vision of the founders—the "Adolphus group" of pioneering Dallas women lawyers who came together in 1969—is realized. The DWLA Foundation envisions a time where barriers to entry into the legal profession will be greatly reduced, all levels of the legal profession from partner to general counsel will reflect the numbers of women that seek and complete a legal education, the legal profession will reflect the rich diversity that is all around us, and all women will be empowered and have the resources to reach their full potential and purpose.

# THANK YOU

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