



A Celebration of 115 Years of the Westchester County Bar Association, a Personal Dream, and Hope for an Exciting Coming Year

BY CAROL L. VAN SCOYOC *

On the occasion of her induction as 67th President of the Westchester County Bar Association, May 19, 2011.

Good evening. Solicitor General Underwood, Chief Administrative Judge Scheinkman, Mayor Tom Roach, Distinguished Members of the Dais, Members of the Judiciary, 50 year Honorees, Past Presidents of the Westchester County Bar Association, Current and Past Presidents of all local bar associations, fellow Bar Association officers and members, colleagues, friends and family:

Thank you Mayor Roach for your kind and gracious words.

I thank each and every one of you for being here this evening and especially wish to commend Executive Director Bill Egan and his devoted staff — Donna Drumm, Gloria Willette, Kaedra Onabanjo, Mary Ellen McCourt and John McCarron—the backbone of this organization—and the Banquet Committee, comprised of Past President Peter Zeltner, Kelly Welch, Stephanie Burns, Jerry Ruderman, Jody Fay, and Don Sandford for all of your efforts in making this evening a success and my sincere gratitude to my predecessor, Don Sandford, for his leadership, support and friendship.

I stand before you tonight filled with both humility and pride, unabashed enthusiasm and a bit of trepidation. I am humbled by the trust you have bestowed upon me and truly honored and proud to be the third woman to lead this prestigious organization upon its 115th anniversary.

I wish to acknowledge and pay tribute to past Bar presidents, Gloria Markuson and Mary Ellen Manley, who is here tonight, for blazing the trail for leadership of all women in this organization. I would also like to recognize the Westchester County Women's Bar President Dolores Gephardt and Incoming President Lonya Gilbert, and Past Women's Bar Presidents Kathy Donnelly and Carla Glassman, classmates of mine from Pace Law School, and Jody Fay, now Vice President of this Association, who are also here in support tonight.

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If someone had said to me when I graduated from Pace Law School in 1985 that this office would be mine, I would have thought it to be an impossible dream. But, after many years of hard work, dedication and loyalty to the legal profession and this great organization, which includes some of the finest and most talented attorneys and members of the Judiciary in New York State, I am standing here at this podium, as the Bar's new President.

The Judiciary, whom we respectfully honor this evening, is an outstanding group of individuals — committed to professionalism, compassion, and the administration of justice in these all too very difficult times. The Judiciary's tenacious spirit is a testament to their deep and devoted loyalty to the bench, to the needs of the County, to the members of this Bar and to the citizens of this State.

The WCBA prides itself as being a single unified force, diverse in its landscape, and in the significant legacy it has achieved in this county's history. Our accomplishments are many — the paths we have taken and the tracks we have made are everlasting. Indeed, in our 115 years, we have reached many milestones and have had many achievements never seen by an organization of our kind.

In my role as President-elect, Don assigned me the formidable task of devising a five year Strategic Plan for the organization, a plan which was unanimously adopted by the Board of Directors last month. I encourage you to read the Strategic Plan which will be made available on the website for members. As your new president, my tenure will focus on initiating the implementation of the Strategic Plan. The most significant long range planning goal and priority for the WCBA is to successfully confront and address the issue of membership retention and member development.

As such, my efforts for our Bar Association will concentrate on striving to impart and deliver the gold standard of "member value" into all of our programs and services, by providing better and advanced communication to our members; promoting, embracing and cultivating collegiality and diversity in membership; discussing relevant, informative, diversified and timely topics at our meetings; maintaining the high quality of our CLE programs and publications; offering entertaining networking activities and opportunities; supporting our Westchester County Bar Foundation; and endeavoring to make a difference in our community at large by hosting events and educational initiatives.

The Plan also acknowledges that we have some work to do to keep pace with the rapid changes in the legal profession. New technologies, new economic realities, increased professional demands — all these factors are impacting how lawyers carry out their professional obligations and live their lives. We must welcome new lawyers, the future of our profession and future of our organization. We must continue to promote the many great things the WCBA has to offer new lawyers — such as programs for training, mentoring, and networking to provide career development specially designed for new attorneys. We must also offer activities and programs designed for the more senior lawyers focusing upon such issues as law practice continuity, pro bono opportunities, mentoring less experienced attorneys, and maximizing technology.

Retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who graced this podium 21 years ago for the installation of President Gloria Markuson, so aptly stated, "We don't accomplish anything in this world alone ... and whatever happens is the result of the whole tapestry of one's life and all the weavings of individual threads form one to another that creates something."

With this in mind, over the course of this year, I look forward to working with the outstanding Executive Committee, consisting of President-Elect Jerry Ruderman, Immediate Past President Don Sandford, Vice-Presidents Jody Fay and Mayo Bartlett, Secretary Jon Dorf and Treasurer, the Hon. Arlene Gordon Oliver, James Garfein and Dawn Arnold, and the Board of Directors that you have elected, as well as the many Section and Committee Co-Chairs in achieving these goals and objectives. We do our excellent work primarily through the Association's Sections and Committees - they are the bedrock and "muscles" of this organization, they should not only be flexed, but will be exercised and utilized.

Most of all, it is you, the membership that has given this organization its life, its purpose, by paying your dues, by contributing to the Westchester County Bar Foundation, by attending this Bar's numerous events and programs, by volunteering your time to participate as presenters in CLE programs, by submitting articles for publication in the *Newsletter* and *Bar Journal* and by upholding the ideals of integrity and civility in our profession.

As lawyers and as an organization, we must defend our profession because it is a noble profession. We must celebrate our commitment to ethics in this profession and educate the public about this commitment. We must be ready and willing to speak up and to explain what we do and why we do it. We must show pride in our profession and must defend the important place we have in our system of justice and strive to attain the highest ideals of our profession. We must educate the public that lawyers are the best hope for a just and free society.

It has been said that our lives have been shaped in significant part by the professions we choose and by individuals who have impacted our lives. In my journey here, I had the fortune to meet such persons and wish to take this opportunity to thank them.

In law school, I had the unique privilege to work as an intern for Les Steinman, the then Director of the Michaelian Municipal Law Resource Center, and former Westchester Assistant Chief Deputy County Attorney. I wish to express my gratitude to Les, who is here tonight, for not only inspiring me to pursue a career in municipal law, but also by playing an integral part in encouraging me to take on a leadership role in this Association by succeeding him as Chair of the Municipal Law Section in 2002.

After graduation from law school, 26 years ago, I was hired by then Westchester County Attorney Henry Logan and Judge Terry Ruderman as an Assistant County Attorney in the Appeals, Opinions and Legislation Bureau of that office. They are both here this evening. I am grateful to both of them for hiring me and for being strong Bar Association advocates.

My first introduction to this Bar Association was through Mr. Logan who assigned me the task of researching the law on inverse condemnation for a speech he was deliv-

ering for a Municipal Law Section meeting. I was thrilled that he invited me, a brand new lawyer, to attend. I was so impressed with the luncheon program, that I immediately joined the Association, and started to attend many Bar Association functions, and the rest is history.

After reaching the rank of Assistant Chief Deputy County Attorney, in 1995, I left that office to become Chief Deputy Corporation Counsel for the City of White Plains. I was hired by then Corporation Counsel John Callahan, who last year, re-joined the City of White Plains government as Corporation Counsel and Chief of Staff. I thank John, a member of this Association and a guest speaker at CLE programs, for all of his support and for being here tonight along with the entire City of White Plains Law Department staff who I wish to recognize: Joe Henneberry, Dan Spencer, Arthur Gutekunst, Doreen Rich, Liz Mirisola and Annette Famulari, and I also wish to recognize White Plains Commissioner of Planning Sue Habel and former Budget Director and now consultant Eileen Earl Bradley. I also wish to thank Mayor Tom Roach again for his kind and gracious remarks and for being on the dais tonight.

I have proudly spent the past 26 years in government service — my career as a local government attorney has been very rewarding and challenging and has afforded me the opportunity to argue in State and Federal appellate courts diverse and novel cases involving issues such as a patient's "right to die," random drug testing of public employees, a multi-million dollar federal consent decree on solid waste management for the County, the modernization of the Westchester County airport and land development projects in White Plains.

There have been many challenges and choices for me to face along the way to this podium tonight, but with all of life's twists and turns, and an unexpected and rather devastating "bump in the road," the pathway for me especially in the past three years has been marked with a renewed and enlightened sense of purpose and meaning of life and for survival, for gratifying experiences and accomplishments as a person and as a lawyer and an adjunct professor, and most of all, for appreciating the real importance of family and long lasting friendships.

While I am a very private person, I feel compelled to share a personal revelation not known by many of you tonight. The "unexpected bump in the road" was in the form of a diagnosis nearly three years ago of a rare and aggressive breast cancer known as inflammatory breast cancer, Stage IV, which I continue to battle every day. I wish to thank Mayor Tom Roach, for his very honest and public announcement on his own past cancer battle, which has served as an inspiration to me. This disease has taken its toll upon numerous members of this organization and our battle must continue to be waged in combating it.

I also owe a debt of gratitude to former Bar Association Executive Director Amy Patterson who is here this evening from Florida, who not only was instrumental in recognizing my potential role in this organization, but more importantly, offered me her endless encouragement and advice to stay the course, remain positive, and do not give up your dream of becoming president one day. Thank you Amy.

I would also wish to express my gratitude to the unyielding kindness, support,

wisdom and guidance I received and continue to receive from Past Presidents, Ralph Nobile, Richard Gardella, John Marwell, Jack Geoghegan, Judge Sam Walker, Judge Adam Seiden, Anthony Enea, Sal Lagonia, and Peter Zeltner. They collectively elevate and reinforce the true meaning of what a bar association should stand for and serve as stellar role models for why lawyers should join the Westchester County Bar Association.

Finally, I would like to thank my wonderful family who are all here tonight to share with me this honor. My mom Elaine, brother Billy and sister Susan, my brother-in-law John and sister-in-law Sara and nieces Melissa and Morgan and nephews Jimmy and John William. While my late Dad, Bill, and my grandparents Anita and Frank, and Ruth and Ted, and my late great uncle, James Caruso, a former Acting State Supreme and Westchester County Court Judge and founder of the Westchester chapter of the Columbian Lawyers Association, are no longer with us, there are here in spirit.

In closing, in a 1946 speech to the Bar Association of the City of New York, the then President of West Virginia Bar Association, John W. Davis, captured and defined the role of lawyers so eloquently when he stated:

True, we build no bridges, we raise no towers, we construct no engines, we paint no pictures. There is little of all that we do which the eye of man can see, but we smooth out the difficulties, we relieve stress, we correct mistakes, we take up other men's burdens and by our efforts, we make possible the peaceful life of men in a peaceful state.

I look forward to the coming year and to the fulfillment of our dreams for this association. Thank you for this honor of serving as your President.