

Creating a More Equal, Balanced and Better Playing Field for Women

By Kim M. Smith

The inequality of women has been a major concern throughout history. While women as a whole have made leaps and bounds educationally and professionally, there is still a significant lag in their equality both economically and politically.

For the first time in history, recent studies show that women have become the majority of the workforce at Fortune 500

companies and own the majority of small start-up businesses. However, women only account for 18 percent of the corporate officer positions and next to none of the chief executive positions at these companies. Women's pay is still far below the pay of men in the same positions and we are under-represented in the areas of technology, math, science, and engineering.

With regard to the field of law, over the



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last 25 years women have come to represent approximately 50 percent of all law school graduates and constitute a significant percentage of lawyers in law firms, corporate legal departments, and government entities. Yet most women lawyers still represent a very small percentage of the law firm leaders, gen-

eral counsel, judiciary, law school deans and government officials.

Despite the significant number of women in the professional workforce, and the advancements that they have attained, the disparities of their positions in the judiciary as well as the political arena remain disconcerting. In Suffolk County, of the 18 member Suffolk County Legislature, only three are women; of the 31 village mayors, only four are women; of the 28 Supreme Court Justices, only seven are women; of the 11 County Court Judges, only one is a woman; of the 24 District Court Judges, only 6 are women; and of the 55 town and village justices only 16 are women. To date, all members of the New York State Assembly from Suffolk County are men and there has never been a woman from Suffolk County in the State Senate or in Congress.

Many ask, with all of the advancements of women within the law and with a dynamic and resourceful Suffolk County Bar Association, do we still need a Women's Bar Association. The answer to this question is yes, there is still much to be done to overcome gender bias and promote women in the field of law. While

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some of the challenges that initiated the creation of both the New York State Women's Bar Association and the Suffolk County Chapter have dissipated, many of them still remain and new challenges are being faced each day. It is as important as ever, if not even more so, for women to use their power and their strength to continue to strive to improve the status of women, to educate women lawyers, to support their professional development and to promote the advancement of women in the legal profession and society as a whole.

The SCBA on has been a great resource and support system for women in the law, as has the New York State Bar Association's Committee on Women in the Law. Together, both associations have promoted and supported women as leaders through their countless programs and numerous resources. It is my goal as current Vice President of programs and nominated President of the Suffolk County Chapter of the New York State Women's Bar Association to continue to work together with the SCBA to present joint programs and enable more opportunities for the advancement and benefit of women in the law and beyond. I believe that with continued and increased mutual cooperation and support from both of our Associations, we can create a more equal, balanced and better playing field to promote the fair and equal administration of justice.

Note: Kim M. Smith, is solo practitioner in Islandia where she practices in the areas of Elder Law, Trust & Estates, Guardianship, Medicaid and Special needs planning. Ms. Smith is currently serving her second year of a two year term as Co-Chair of the Suffolk County Bar Association's Elder Law and Estate Planning Committee and is a frequent lecturer at the bar association. Kim M. Smith is also serving as the current Vice President of Programs for the Suffolk County Women's Bar Association and has been nominated President for the 2011 term.