

The Women of Section E

Law School friendships still strong in class of 1983

They met as first-year Law

School students, assigned that fall of 1980 to Section E. Over the 28 years that followed, they've gathered each month or so for dinner and conversation.

"We're a diverse group of great friends who happen to have met at law school and have been with each other ever since, from the early days when we didn't know anything to today when new lawyers ask us how it all works, and everything in between," explains Tammy Pust, an employment and education law attorney with Parker Rosen.

Marcia Kimball was pregnant on the first day of law school, but Deb Page remembers her saying, "No problem. I'm going to have this baby over Thanksgiving weekend." Page, today a partner at Lindquist & Vennum focusing on real estate, went home and told her husband, "You are not going to believe this."

Sure enough, Kimball, who represents the BIA for the U.S. Department of the Interior's Office of the Solicitor, went into labor the day before Thanksgiving and missed only six days of class. She recalls former Professor David P. Bryden joking that everyone in class had been "laboring" with their studies, some more than others.

During law school, the friends discussed classes and finding jobs. As their lives changed, so did the topics: to work and partnerships, pregnancy and childcare, health and aging parents. And they kept talking.

Pust remembers when seven members were pregnant at the same time. Kimball recalls everyone sharing maternity clothes and old outfits,



Top: Section E during Law School days.

Bottom (clockwise, from bottom left): Debra Page, Sharon Freier, Susan Vandenberg, Marikay Canaga Litzau, Barb Shiels, Elizabeth Thompson, Laura Fretland, Tammy Pust, Dorian (Samskar) Jordan, Marcia Kimball

because they all "needed professional clothes." All the women laughed about pumping breast milk at the office.

Elizabeth Thompson, co-founder of Minneapolis immigration law practice Myers Thompson, recounts participating in a board meeting via her home phone—while cooking and holding a baby on her hip. "I decided to go to the grocery store with the baby and continue the call in the car... I was sure I could fit that in."

"We didn't feel like we were blazing a trail," Pust says of the group's drive and commitment. "We did it because we were women and moms and lawyers, and we did what we had

to do to be all those things."

They did what had to be done in the bad times, too. "My Mom died when I was only 30," says Marikay Canaga Litzau, a due process specialist in student discipline and special education compliance at Minnesota's Department of Education. "This group was very helpful through that."

Two of the group had infertility problems, another became pregnant and was reluctant to tell her partners, two faced cancer. They all found support among Section E friends.

Section E is also the first place they turn with professional questions. All types of legal practice are represented

in the group. Laura Fretland practices family law at the firm now called Anderson, Dove, Fretland and Van Valkenburg. Barb Shiels practices in research regulation, health law, data privacy, faculty employment, and student affairs issues at the University of Minnesota. Susan Vandenberg focuses on business law and complex commercial transactions at Henson & Efron. Sharon Freier, a partner at Fredrikson & Byron, specializes in commercial, corporate, and international areas.

“Over the years,” says Pust, “we’ve traded resumes of people looking for

jobs, helped each other draft firm policies by sharing templates, and compared partnership compensation structures.” They’ve offered each other information and advice on mentoring, recruiting, growth and development—and changing career paths when that was the only way to accommodate all the responsibilities these women hold important.

The kinship formed in law school has supported them throughout their professional and personal lives, Litzau says. “Besides our shared history of being women lawyers during that time period, this group has been a very

special community for us.”

A little thing like relocating has no effect on Section E bonds, says Dorian (Samskar) Jordan. Despite moving to Appleton, Wisc., where her husband runs Air Wisconsin and both are aviation gurus, her friendships remain as close as ever.

Pust sums it up: “Our friendships have helped each of us in different ways through all the phases we’ve traveled, which is what good friends do for each other.”

By Kit Naylor, principal, Kittridge Communications, Minneapolis.

Law School Celebrates Women in Law

The Law School’s first Women in Law Celebration

To honor the strengths and achievements of women in the legal profession drew nearly 100 alumna, women students, and women faculty. The January 31, 2008, event also kicked off a new initiative designed to present programs of professional interest to women; provide networking opportunities for women law students, graduates, and faculty; and build support and engagement among participants and with the Law School.

After a lively reception, Professor Carol Chomsky opened the elimination-of-bias CLE credit portion of the evening with a historical overview of women in law—at the University of Minnesota and beyond. A panel of leading Law School alumna then discussed their career paths, including challenges and high points as women lawyers, and offered advice for enjoying and succeeding in professional life. Panel members were Jeanette Bazis ('92), Sara Peterson ('00), Michelle Miller ('86), Amy Seidel ('98), and Judge Natalie Hudson ('82).

Special thanks go to Dorsey & Whitney for hosting the celebration and to the planning committee: Professor Carol Chomsky, Barbara D’Aquila ('79), Brita Johnson De Malignon ('07), Kathleen DiGiorno ('88), Judith Oakes ('69), Nena Street ('06), Susan Thomas ('85), and students Erin Hooper ('09) and Meghan Moriarty ('08).

The Law School is eager to expand this initiative and offer future programs and events that address the range of practice areas, sectors, and experiences of women in the legal community. If you would like to become a member of the planning committee or offer ideas for future programming, please contact Sara Jones ('88) at 612-626-1888 or shj@umn.edu.

By Sara Jones ('88), senior major gifts officer, Law School.



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1. Honorable Natalie Hudson ('82), Michelle Miller ('86), and Professor Carol Chomsky
2. Cathy Gorlin ('78) and Kitty Taylor ('78)
3. L-R, Lindsay Eastman ('10), Laurie Bardenwerper ('10), Audrey Lin ('10), Becca Stark ('10), Deirdre Baskin ('10)