

Why Men Join Oregon Women Lawyers

By Mark Johnson

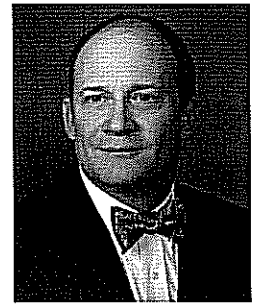
Many of you have already heard this story—in fact, I suspect that the story itself may have played a role in my selection to write this article—but it's a good story, and it does relate to the topic at hand. Although a member of OWLS from its earliest days, I attended my first meeting as a member in 1996, when I was a candidate for election to the OSB Board of Governors. My good friend and colleague Ann Morgenstern volunteered to take me to Queen's Bench and introduce me to the members. Surprisingly anxious, I asked Ann as we walked to the meeting, "Will there be other men there?" She shot me a withering glance. "Mark, men only come to Queen's Bench when they're running for office!"

I'm glad to say that Ann's observation either wasn't true or it became outdated with the passing of time, because, although I was indeed the only man present that day, I have since attended many OWLS functions with other men in attendance. Today there are 45 OWLS members who identify themselves as male in the membership rolls.

Besides me (a former OSB president), the list includes current OSB President Albert Menashe as well as nine current or retired state court judges. Although this group might be characterized on some level as "running for office," I suspect that my experience is typical: I joined because I supported the group's mission, and I hope that my known support for the group's mission led OWLS members to support me, in turn, when I ran for office. It's also true that, as President Menashe observes, both of us benefited in our bar service from learning what OWLS members thought about bar-related issues.

Besides the power and glory, though, what other reasons do men give for joining OWLS? I was intrigued to discover that most of the men I spoke to focused on continuing education and networking opportunities, such as the contract lawyer lunches and the email listserv. My own motivations reflect, I suppose, my status as an "out" gay lawyer: I enjoy the social environment that I find at OWLS gatherings and the interchange that takes place among bar members who are

pursuing non-traditional roles in the legal profession. Andrew SkinnerLopata's comments reflect sentiments similar to mine: "I get to meet some of the most interesting and best practitioners in the state. As a father who actively participates in my children's care and upbringing, I benefit from many of the discussions on the OWLS listserv regarding balancing family responsibilities and my law career."



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Among other questions, I asked the male members of OWLS whether the organization should be doing anything to attract more male members. It's fair to say that all the men I talked to felt that they personally benefited from their OWLS membership and participation. As to whether OWLS should do anything affirmative, though, opinion was considerably more divided. The general sentiment seems to be that the organization is visible enough and respected enough that it is already attracting those men who want to contribute to the organization's mission by becoming members.

Circuit Judge Philip Arnold remarked that "among its virtues, Oregon Women Lawyers does a good job of eliminating the vestiges of negative stereotypes," and related the following story: "When I enrolled at the University of Tennessee College of Law, there were two women students in the law school. When my daughter, Jackie, enrolled at the University of Oregon, women were more than 50 percent of her class. A couple of weeks ago when Jackie (now practicing in California) was talking to her five-year-old daughter Mathilde about our upcoming visit, Mathilde asked, 'Mommie, how do you get to be a judge?' Jackie told her that first one had to be a lawyer for a while and then maybe one could be a judge. Mathilde thought about it and exclaimed, 'Well, since all lawyers are girls, grandpa must be a girl!'"

If the long-term goal of an organization like OWLS is to outlive its usefulness, Mathilde's observation helps us see that we're well on our way.

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