

# An Interview with Shari R. Gordon

Susan L. Pollet  
Chair of the Archive and  
Historian Committee;  
Westchester County's District  
Attorney's Office

**Q:** You have been a leader both with the WWBA and WBASNY. Please tell us about your contributions to both organizations over the years.

**A:** I joined the Westchester Women's Bar Association in or about 2002 after moving my law practice to Westchester County. Encouraged by WWBA member Alayne Katz, and mentored by Past-President of the WWBA Kathleen Donelli, Esq, of McCarthy Fingar, LLP, I became Co-Chair of the Public Relations Committee. Subsequently, I became a four term State Director, a position in which I currently continue to serve. Also, I became the Co-Chair of Families Children and Courts Committee, a position I have held since 2004. I also served on the WWBA Judicial Screening Committee.

For the Women's Bar of the State of New York (WBASNY), our "mother organization," I was for many years Co-Chair of Reproductive Rights, focusing on the passage of the Reproductive Health Act, to codify into New York's Public Health Law the right of a woman to choose her own reproductive health. I was also instrumental in facilitating WBASNY becoming a member of the New York Alliance for Women's Health, a coalition of over 50 women's health care organizations promoting equal access to health care for women.

**Q:** Tell us about your practice and how you have developed it here in

***"My exposure to many women judges . . . has demonstrated the importance of women on the bench."***

**Westchester County?**

**A:** While attending Union University at Albany Law School I clerked for the outstanding matrimonial practitioner, lecturer and author, Timothy M. Tippins, Esq. where I had the opportunity to observe and participate in his trial practice and to assist in the preparation of his four volume treatise, "New York Matrimonial Law and Practice." After graduation, I worked for two local Westchester Town Court judges in Greenburgh and Cortlandt, assisting in both their private practice and their judicial research and writing. As a Senior Trial Attorney for the Criminal Defense Division of the Legal Aid Society, Bronx County for many years, I accumulated substantial trial experience. Currently, I serve on both the First Judicial Department and Westchester County felony panels.

I then practiced as a partner in a private law firm located in New York City for over a decade before moving to Westchester County, opening the Law Offices of Shari R. Gordon located in both Yorktown Heights and White Plains, New York. The firm concentrates primarily in matrimonial and family law and criminal defense. Over the years, the practice has continued to grow, along with my two sons, Samuel and Noah.

On the political front, I am

an elected district leader for the Cortlandt Democratic Party and an elected delegate for the Ninth Judicial District Judicial Convention. My next political frontier is judicial office. I hope to become the first female judge in my home community of Cortlandt. My exposure to many women judges both on the bench and via WWBA and WBASNY has demonstrated the importance of women on the bench, especially in positions such as Town Judgeships, which are dominated by men. I believe that by being a former public defender, a current criminal and civil trial attorney, and a former law clerk to the judiciary, I possess the knowledge, patience, and empathy to meet the present day challenges facing a Judge.

**Q:** I understand that you were involved in writing a book. Please describe that to us.

**A:** My friend and colleague Joel Martin Aurnou, Esq., mentioned over lunch one day that his granddaughter had asked him to write a book about his extraordinary legal career. That passing comment grew into a collaborative project with Joel that is over 350 pages covering Mr. Aurnou's involvement in both civil and murder cases in federal, state and appellate courts all over the United States including Texas, Colorado, Pennsylvania and New York. Hopefully, that project will be complete within the year.



Shari R. Gordon

**Q:** What projects are you currently working on?

**A:** I have also just completed serving four years as Program Co-Chair for the Summer Justice Academy for Young Women. The Academy is a two-week program for high school students held at Pace Law School and taught by Judges, Law Professors and lawyers with practices concentrating in various areas of the law. Some of the courses have included Constitutional law and the American Jury System, Civil and Criminal Law, Health Law, Matrimonial and Family Law, Domestic Violence, Bankruptcy, Ethics, General Tort Liability, Finance and Real Estate, Running your Own Business and Dressing for Success. The Academy usually culminates in an overnight trip to Washington, D.C. where the young women visit the United States Supreme Court, including a tour of Justice Robert's "situation room" located outside Justice Robert's Chambers where the Justices discuss their decisions; the White House, The United States Capitol and Howard and George Washington Universities. Each stu-

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dent is required to submit a legal memorandum, and an essay about her most memorable program experience. The goal of the program is to provide additional support to high school students from diverse backgrounds for higher education, including law school. It is sponsored by the National Association of Women Judges, Pace Law School, the New York State Judicial Institute, the Westchester Women's Bar Association, the Westchester Women's Bar Association Foundation, and many other local bar associations, law firms, and individual donors, as well as the New York Yankees and the New York Mets.

I was often a guest on the WWOX radio show of prominent criminal defense

attorney Murray Richman; and frequently, when he was on trial, I would co-host his show with Judge Kevin Quaranta from Bedford Town Court. Several years ago Judge Quaranta and I began to co-host our own show, the "First Friday Show," featuring prominent legal figures and legal subjects, which still airs today. Sadly, my radio co-host Judge Quaranta recently passed away; but, I am continuing our important project by co-hosting with various guest hosts.

**Q: Tell us about your family and the challenges of work and home life.**

A: Anyone who has ever raised two male adolescents and practiced law at the same time knows the answer to that question. My older son Samuel is a sophomore at Lehigh University studying Finance, and

my younger son Noah is a freshman in High School interested in soccer and golf. His long-term goal is to attend West Point. My children often tell me how proud they are of my accomplishments. As a family, we have traveled extensively, including Italy, Spain, London, Alaska and the Continental United States. We enjoy skiing and snow boarding. This year I have added mountain climbing for recreation and fitness. I come from a large family of eight siblings and 19 grandchildren. With my mother's death in late August, I was reminded of my good fortune to have a close-knit family. The outpouring of support from all of my friends at the WWBA has made me very grateful for their friendship, and for joining the WWBA so many years ago. ▀

## Multi-Bar Diversity Program

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Hudson Valley, the Pace Women's Justice Center, and the Ninth Judicial District Committee to Promote Gender Fairness in the Courts, attended this program.

Mr. James, who has been a strong advocate for increasing diversity in the State Bar, began his term as President of the NYSBA on June 1, 2012. During his presentation, Mr. James discussed the impressive strides which the NYSBA and its sections have made in promoting diversity in the legal profession, including the increase of women and minorities in leadership positions and as committee members. Mr. James explained that "Diversity and inclusion is an on-going and multi-faceted goal" and that "we are a richer organization by embracing diversity."

Mr. James stated that "we must continuously work to increase diversity in the bar association and in the sections." He discussed the NYSBA's policy regarding diversity and noted that NYSBA By-laws were adopted to increase diversity in the House of Delegates and Executive Committee. He also discussed the importance of building on Past President Vincent Doyle's Section Diversity Challenge that was started in 2011, which calls for more diversity in the various sections, including



Wayne Humphrey, Jerrice Duckette-Epps, Hon. Janet C. Malone, Seymour James, Jr. and Lonya A. Gilbert

the Section/Committee chair positions. The NYSBA has published a "Best Practices from the Section Diversity Challenge Champions." During his presidency, Mr. James has taken this initiative to the next phase with a program entitled "Reaching for the Next Level." For the past ten years, during its annual meeting in January, the NYSBA has sponsored the *Celebrating Diversity in the Bar Reception*. During this reception, the NYSBA's committees and sections and county, minority, and ethnic bar associations in New York collaborate to present awards to diversity trailblazers in the legal community. The awards ceremony is followed by a networking reception.

Hon. Janet C. Malone then facilitated the discussion and posed questions to both Mr. James and Mr. Humphrey regarding how to define diversity and how to achieve

it. Mr. James encouraged the attendees to review the NYSBA's statement on diversity. He also noted that the initiatives taken by the various bar associations have assisted in increasing diversity, including programs which foster and encourage candid discussions regarding this important topic. Mr. James stated that to increase diversity, "you have to be welcoming." He stated that it was important to recruit individuals from diverse backgrounds and let them know that they are important to your organization or company. Judge Malone also provided her personal experiences while attending school and during the time that she served as an Assistant District Attorney in the Manhattan District Attorney's Office. Mr. Humphrey also shared his personal experiences while growing up in diverse communities in Queens, New York. He discussed the importance of mentoring programs to assist students and young lawyers, and encouraged greater diversity in the workforce.

This truly informative and wonderful program is a part of the WWBA's Continuing Lecture Series on Diversity Initiatives in the Field of Law. We wish to thank Wilson Elser Moskowitz Edelman & Dicker LLP and its Diversity Committee, Keane & Beane, P.C. and the Hudson Valley Bank for their generous support. ▀