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The 'Best Of' Women in Law Programs

By Eva Wisnik and Jennifer Johnson

Women in Law initiatives and programs are not a new phenomenon. Many firms nationwide have programs that afford their women attorneys business development, mentoring and career counseling. In writing this article, we spoke to ten different firms (see end caption which lists the firms in the order in which they are profiled in this article) to learn the how's and why's of their women's initiatives.

AKIN GUMP STRAUSS HAUER & FELD LLP — WASHINGTON, DC

Perhaps the oldest program from the firms we spoke with, Akin Gump began their weekend women's retreats in Texas in 1989. "It began with a small group of women Partners who wanted to get to know their women clients on a more informal and personal level," according to Cheryl Falvey, a Partner in Akin's Washington, DC office. From there, Akin's initiatives grew with more and more attorneys and clients attending each year, and now the program has evolved to become more national in scope. Over the last 2 years, they have added programs in addition to yearly weekend retreats and have held events on a more regional basis. Most recently, they had a daylong program in DC featuring Zoe Strickland, the Chief Privacy Officer for the United States Postal Service who spoke on privacy issues in the workplace. The Dallas office had an event highlighting their internal women's mentoring program and invited their clients to come with someone they were mentoring within their company. "It is difficult to benchmark results," says Falvey, "but the positive feedback we receive keeps the programming going." Falvey credits Bruce McLean, the firm's Chairman, for being a huge supporter of the events. McLean's support reaches outside the firm as evidenced when he served as a chairman and speaker for The National Institute for Women in Law Firms conference. In addition to sending out an electronic evaluation form following each event, the participants hold a de-briefing session that facilitates the follow-up activities.

BARNES & THORNBURG LLP — FORT WAYNE, IN

"Eight years ago, we realized the need for women to simply network with each other," says Kathleen Anderson, a Partner in the Fort Wayne office. "It occurred to us that there were many events that have guest lists consisting of men and women, but were attended by mostly men." The female lawyers of Barnes & Thornburg began by creating networking opportunities for women in the community. Their "Women in Leadership" invitations went out to female clients, female leaders in the community both civic and nonprofit, as well as female leaders within the local educational systems. Although the male lawyers of the firm are invited to attend the event, the guests are only women. After the initial networking events reached attendance of more than 100 people, the firm decided to offer speakers who were of interest to attendees. In 2002, the firm presented Carolyn Woo, Dean of the Mendoza College of Business at the University of Notre Dame, who addressed the timely topic of business ethics. In the firm's most recent reception, Fort Wayne native Kartrina Markhoff spoke about her founding of Vosges Haut-Chocolat in Chicago. While the firm cannot point to a specific result in new business, it has received a lot of intangible feedback such as notes and inquiries for the schedules of upcoming events. Anderson says the constant receipt of these intangibles will keep the events going.

**BINGHAM MCCUTCHEM LLP —
SAN FRANCISCO**

According to Charlene Shimada, a 23-year veteran of Bingham McCutchen and the first woman to become a Litigation Partner in the firm, as well as the first woman Managing Partner of the San Francisco office, “we have had a decade of initiatives for women but most of the energy has been expended in the last 5-6 years as more women have entered the Partnership.” Shimada stresses, “we can greatly help those who come after us in terms of creating a more hospitable environment.” Bingham McCutchen’s women’s marketing initiatives, says Shimada, “stems from recognizing early on that our ability to generate business ties directly to our compensation and our opportunities for leadership roles.” Their initiatives began as simple events such as internal seminars but evolved over time to the “Women In Law” series where senior level in-house counsel alumni speak at the firm. While they have many broad-based events in their programming meant to reach out to women on the whole, it is of note that they have tailored at least one of their women’s programs to a niche practice, Venture Capital. In the fall of 2003, Bingham used their sponsorship and participation of an event orchestrated by Springboard Enterprises, an organization that connects women-led emerging companies with the venture capitalists who fund them, to promote their women lawyers in the Venture Capital group. Another tactic that Bingham uses is to identify major events occurring around the nation and capitalize on them by planning corresponding events during the same time in order to gain a larger audience. For example, in July 2004, they will host a seminar at the same time as the Democratic National Convention in Boston on the topic of policy issues affecting women in business. According to Libby Chambers, Chief Marketing & Strategy Officer, they are developing a page to add to the firm’s intranet to “discuss strategies and ideas for work/life balance, identify pro bono opportunities and discuss where and how women have been successful in marketing.” Chambers adds, “we are focusing now on making sure that women have access to client pitches and making sure that the teams are not only the best for the task but also the right, diverse, balance.”

**EPSTEIN BECKER & GREEN, P.C. —
NEW YORK, NY**

“Epstein Becker & Green’s Women’s Initiative was launched 3 years ago in response to a desire to provide its attorneys, clients and friends with an effective forum for networking and information sharing,” says Rachel Silverman, Esq., Manager of Marketing and Practice Development. Three women Partners, in collaboration with the Marketing Department, developed a plan of action that they presented to the firm’s Executive Committee. The plan involved programming that would allow the participants to walk away with something tangible after each event such as golf clinics, self defense classes, cooking classes and wine tasting classes. Today, EBG sponsors social networking programming in each of the 12 cities where it maintains offices. Their events draw business owners, senior executives, general counsel, and human resources professionals from all industries. In keeping with their focus, recently the EBG Women’s Initiative held its third annual golf clinic and networking event in Basking Ridge, New Jersey and its second wine tasting in Atlanta. “Our women’s Initiative has become very popular very quickly for a few reasons,” says Silverman, “the programs are all informative, the atmosphere has been consistently casual and fun.” Silverman says that internal support for the program is extremely high and the support externally is just as great. “The response we get to these events is unbelievable,” says Silverman, “as soon as we put an event on the calendar, the calls and e-mails start coming. Women want to be invited and want to bring their colleagues. It’s extremely encouraging.”

**GOLDBERG KOHN —
CHICAGO**

www.gkENGAGE (ENGAGE) came to life 18 months ago and is, according to the organization’s Web site, a “not-for-profit organization founded by the women of Goldberg Kohn to bring together business and professional women to engage in networking, educational and philanthropic activities.” The mission of the organization is three-pronged: to provide

networking opportunities; to provide a topic of education for women; and to be philanthropic. According to Deni Caplan, a Goldberg Kohn attorney and one of ENGAGE's founders, "the purpose of ENGAGE is to encourage women to participate in something that's deeper and richer than a simple networking group." Since its inception, ENGAGE has held two events yearly with each event focusing on one specific charitable organization. The firm uses its events to raise awareness of the specific organization and then leads by example by making a monetary contribution while guests make donations on a voluntary basis. For their next event in October, Joan Kohn, host of HGTV's "Bed & Bath Design" and "Kitchen Design", will share home improvement tips. The event will support domestic violence awareness. Following every event, each guest receives a list of all attendees to maximize networking and relationship building and ENGAGE supplements twice yearly with a newsletter. ENGAGE is measuring its success by tracking attendance and compiling anecdotal feedback. One interesting note is that they have recently licensed their name and concept to a law firm in Australia. According to Alycia Sutor, Goldberg's Director of Marketing, "one of the reasons for ENGAGE's success has been its focused approach. ENGAGE has a very defined mission that all of our activities adhere to."

KIRKLAND & ELLIS LLP — NEW YORK

Kirkland's marketing initiatives for women are focused internally on their female attorneys rather than externally on female clients. Partner Jennifer Selendy says, "we provide our talented women with the skills and resources they need to succeed at the Firm and to do client development." Kirkland takes the lead from their women attorneys and responds with programming they request. According to Selendy, "Kirkland has always had an informal mentoring system and so the women's initiative came from something that is organic to who we are." The more formal women's leadership initiative in the New York office is driven by one Partner each from Corporate, Real Estate and Litigation and the local Manager of Recruiting and Manager of Attorney Training and Development. The office sponsors monthly lunches for the purpose of internal networking as well as quarterly panels or roundtable

discussions with topics determined from what the women attorneys have said they want to hear. Most recently, they had a communications consultant come to the office to talk about how to be effective when speaking with clients and colleagues which was followed by offering one-on-one coaching sessions. In July, they are offering a panel discussion with a few women clients who will talk about what they look for in evaluating and selecting outside counsel. Selendy says, "Thus far, our female attorneys have been primarily interested in skills training, and socializing events with female clients have not been at the top of their wish lists." As long as the women at Kirkland continue to provide feedback on what they feel they need, Kirkland will deliver.

McKENNA LONG & ALDRIDGE —ATLANTA, GA

McKenna Long & Aldridge's program is the creation of members of the Firm's female partnership. In 1997, after reading an article from another Firm regarding a retreat for women, these Partners decided that the Firm's clients and prospective clients would benefit from a similar initiative. "We put our heads together to discuss which invitations we accept or decline and why," says Ruth Flynn, one of the program's founding Partners. "We threw out ideas of events that we would want to attend and then chose one and put it in to action," says Flynn. The initial decision was to hold an all-day event titled "Professional Women's Roundtable" and to invite women who play a key role in corporations around the country. According to Flynn, "seven years later, our mission remains the same: to make significant connections or re-connections with clients and prospective clients and to offer training programs of interest to women." McKenna Long & Aldridge's daylong program includes three speakers, one at breakfast, lunch and mid-afternoon. Topics have included diversity awareness, communication skills and negotiation skills. Flynn says, "It is critical to have topical and interesting speakers — programming that you could tell your boss that you're taking the day off to attend." MLA typically aims for 50-60 attendees in order to maintain an intimate event. "We arrange people at round tables and put at least one MLA woman at each table." Flynn admits, "the first time we held the event many asked questions as to the goal, but later it proved to be a useful, and

expected, annual event.” After the event, McKenna’s host committee sends a formal thank you note to each attendee. Further informal follow up is done on an individual basis. Although there is support for the program nationwide, each office and region selects a topic based on their needs.

SCHWARTZ, COOPER, GREENBERGER & KRAUSS, CHTD. — CHICAGO

According to Lynne Baker, Director of Business Development, “We want Schwartz, Cooper to be known as a connector for our clients.” Their program began in 2002, after the guest list at Partner Mary Dicig’s annual gathering in her home of professional female colleagues and friends hit 250 women. At that point, Mary and Lynne went to Firm management and pitched the idea of it becoming a firm-sponsored event. The Firm quickly agreed and “Women’s Night” was born. In adding to the guest list, the male Partners provide a list of their female clients and then a “briefing session” is held with the Women Partners. Each woman Partner and Associate is assigned a client that they must seek out at the event and for whom they can provide introductions. This assures that the clients of the male attorneys are taken care of. Paralegals are also invited to attend this event since, according to Baker, “often times corporate clients spend as much time during each day interacting with paralegals as with lawyers.” The Schwartz, Cooper event is a combination of social networking and entertainment. At their most recent event, an all female improv group performed and had many of the guests actively participate in the performance. Post-program, each attendee has the option of having their name on the master attendee list, which is then distributed to all attendees. Additionally, a survey is enclosed in a post-event mailing that includes specific ideas for future programming allowing the guest to choose a programming preference such as monthly lunches or bi-monthly dinners. “Our event is purposely not a legal seminar – we decided to offer an atmosphere that gives our female clients the opportunity to make both personal and business connections without having to listen to a sales pitch,” says Baker. Baker continues, “women like to help other women in business and people always remember where they made great contacts.”

SEDGWICK, DETERT, MORAN & ARNOLD LLP — SAN FRANCISCO

Kathleen Flynn, Director of Client Services & Marketing, is pleased to announce, “we have just launched Sedgwick’s ‘Women’s Forum’ firmwide with a three-pronged mission: to provide a platform for Sedgwick’s female attorneys to voice their professional development needs, to recommend programs to enhance the role of women in the firm and the profession, and to provide business development programs targeting women attorneys and women clients.” The program is co-chaired by the Firm’s Hiring Partner/Co-Chair Diversity Committee, the firm’s Director of Attorney Recruiting, and Flynn. The initiative began after Sedgwick signed on to be a participant in the Bar Association of San Francisco’s “No Glass Ceiling Initiative” which calls for at least 25% of women in management and partnership ranks within area law firms by year-end 2004. In San Francisco, the Forum will be sponsoring an event titled “Top 100 Women Owned Business in San Francisco” and will soon thereafter host a wine and cheese event featuring a female attorney/author of mystery books. Sedgwick’s Women’s Forum plans to measure its success long-term by looking forward to an increase in overall retention and also by the positive feedback received from the events. Internally, the Forum plans to host videoconference lunches firm wide for its women professionals. Programming topics will relate to professional and business development as well as personal focus such as eldercare preparedness and childcare strategies for working mothers.

STEEL HECTOR & DAVIS LLP — WEST PALM BEACH, FL

In 1999, Steel Hector & Davis was awarded the Corporate Athena Award by the Palm Beach County Chamber of Commerce for “professional excellence, community service, and also for actively and generously assisting women in their attainment of professional excellence.” Steel Hector’s quest for excellence in its women predates the award by a decade. In the early 1990’s Traci Rollins, a Partner at Steel Hector & Davis LLP, and some of her female colleagues began hearing concerns about work/life balance from the women Associates. As a result of these concerns, they started monthly lunches to discuss perceived glass-ceiling issues. The regular gathering evolved in

to Steel Hector’s “Women in Law Group”, which since has expanded beyond workplace issues to include various marketing initiatives. The group holds in-house meetings on topics designed to empower its women professionals. Topics range from the client development to juggling the responsibilities of being a working mother. “Our attorneys are not looking for theoretical and philosophical analysis,” says Rollins, “they want five practical tips to make it work.” The Women In Law Group makes it a point to solicit advice from its alumni, who include federal and state court judges, politicians and civil servants. The firm and its Women in Law Group promote teamwork in business development initiatives. This was evidenced when the group came together and focused on a list of the 500 largest womenowned businesses and each female lawyer added her personal contacts, ideas, and suggestions to the collective marketing approach. “We find that marketing works best when we tap in to each other’s strengths, resources and abilities rather than trying to do it alone,” says Rollins. And while

Steel Hector actively markets through traditional lunches and the occasional cocktail reception, the group’s initiatives are focused on including junior attorneys in day-today opportunities to work with existing and prospective clients. “We feel that the best way to learn is by being around people who do it better than you,” says Rollins. When asked how Steel Hector measures its success from these activities, Rollins says, “the best indicator of success is that our women professionals have risen in the ranks. We have a woman on our board of directors and women involved in every department within the firm.”

To those of you who are thinking about initiating a women in law program, we hope that this article has given you food for thought and that you will move forward with your initiatives.

<i>Firm Name</i>	<i>Total Lawyers (women) & Offices</i>
Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP	917 (280) Austin, Brussels, Dallas, Houston, London, Los Angeles, Moscow, New York, Philadelphia, Riverside, Riyadh (affiliate), San Antonio, San Francisco and Washington, DC
Barnes & Thornburg LLP	374 (87) Chicago; Elkhart, IN; Fort Wayne, IN; Grand Rapids, MI; Indianapolis; South Bend, IN; and Washington, DC
Bingham McCutchen LLP	817 (321) Boston, Hartford, London, Los Angeles, New York, Orange County, San Francisco, Silicon Valley, Tokyo, Walnut Creek, Washington, DC
Epstein Becker & Green P.C.	368 (145) Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Newark, San Francisco, Stamford, Washington, DC
Goldberg, Kohn, Bell, Black, Rosenbloom & Moritz, Ltd.	81 (20) Chicago
Kirkland & Ellis LLP	915 (266) Chicago, London, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, Washington, DC
McKenna Long & Aldridge LLP	312 (90) Atlanta, Brussels, Denver, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, San Diego, San Francisco, Washington, DC
Schwartz, Cooper, Greenberger & Krauss	73 (18) Chicago
Sedgwick, Detert, Moran & Arnold, LLP	345 (113) Chicago, Dallas, Orange County, London, Los Angeles, New York, Newark, Paris, San Francisco, Zurich

Steel Hector & Davis LLP

200 (68) Buenos Aires, Caracas, Key West, London, Miami, Naples,
Rio de Janeiro, Santo Domingo, São Paulo, Tallahassee, Tel Aviv,
West Palm Beach

*Information provided by firms and their Web
sites*

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