

Limited

Bloomington-Normal's Premier Lifestyle and Business Magazine - October 2017



Plus coverage of 12
local events

Women in *Law*

Local women raising the bar

Michelle Mosby-Scott and Helen Ogar photos by David Proeber | Ronda Glenn photo by Ken Kashian

WOMEN in

Law

Story by Breanna Grow • Photos by David Proeber

While the latest research on women's enterprise gives cause for celebration this National Women in Small Business Month, the legal profession continues to lag behind other industries in women's ownership.

The 2016 "State of Women-Owned Businesses Report," commissioned by American Express OPEN, found there are over 11 million women-owned businesses, supporting nearly 9 million jobs and generating annual revenues of \$1.6 trillion.

Compare those figures to the legal profession, where women receive 47 percent of total law degrees awarded, yet represent just 36 percent of those practicing law, according to an American Bar Association report released in January, "A Current Glance at Women in the Law."

While the ABA doesn't keep track of the number of women-owned law firms, the report showed even fewer women – 18 percent – are equity partners, earning a share of the firm's profits. The report also found women lawyers earned 89 percent of male lawyer's weekly salary.

The numbers appear discouraging for women who want a successful career practicing law. Three long-time local women attorneys, now owners of their own law firms, explain that isn't necessarily the case.

Helen Ogar at her desk.



Firm owners offer insight, encouragement



Ronda Glenn Law Offices recently moved to a new office at 221 E. Front St. in downtown Bloomington. Photo by Ken Kashian.

CATCHING UP

"It wasn't all that long ago that [the legal profession] was primarily men," said Helen Ogar, of Ogar & Miller in Bloomington. "Don't forget, we've got guys in their 70s still practicing law. So we're still catching up." Ogar suspects a survey focused on younger attorneys might reveal a more equal representation of women in law.

Ogar also believes some women choose to pursue a career outside of law after graduation; from academia to the corporate world, "with a law degree you can do a million things."

She herself never intended to use her degree in political history to become an attorney. Instead of pursuing a

Ph.D. in history, Ogar went to law school "kind of on a whim. I thought if I didn't like it, I was going to quit." But Ogar didn't just like law school: "it was a blast."

The University of Missouri grad took a job at a general practice firm in Kansas City, Mo., moving to Bloomington in 1986. Over the course of her 32-year career, Ogar has seen "a big shift," with more women practicing law.

She recalled how her sister, 10 years her senior, had to leave the building to find a women's restroom when she studied law in the late 1970s. "By the time I got there, I think my class was about a third women (and the building had a women's restroom) ... So it wasn't all that long ago that it was primarily men."

BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY

While Ogar raised five children working as an attorney, some of her former classmates chose to slow down their careers for their families.

"They still make a good living, but the long hours aren't so long," she said. "They get to go home and do what they need to do."

Michelle Mosby-Scott, lead attorney and owner of Allison & Mosby-Scott in Bloomington, recalled nights spent rocking babies to sleep with one hand and reviewing legal documents with the other.

At times she felt guilty about leaving a nanny to look after her sick children while she attended a trial, or walking in late to birthdays or sporting events. "But those are really few and far between. And I think as parents we make those things bigger issues for ourselves than they ever are for our children," she said.

"It is a juggling act. But I've never in those 22 years thought, 'I wish I would've done something else with my life.'" Ultimately, Mosby-Scott believes a woman can be "a phenomenal lawyer and a phenomenal mother at the same time."

For both Ogar and Mosby-Scott, finding balance took time, but having strong support systems helped make it possible.

"In Bloomington, it's easier," said Ogar. "We have a small enough bar association and a small enough group of practicing lawyers that they understand. A lot of us would know if something personal were going on."

Mosby-Scott said having a supportive husband made a difference for her career.

Michelle Mosby-Scott in the office lobby.



"He's always been one of those people who said, 'If you want it, make it happen.' That also makes life easier professionally because I've always got someone who's got my back. And I know some people don't have that."

TAKING RISKS

Ronda Glenn opened her own firm in Bloomington in 1995. Since then, Glenn said both men and women attorneys have had to borrow larger amounts of money to go to law school. That can be a barrier to obtaining higher-paying positions.

"If you're still paying for your education, it may be hard to buy in on a law firm," said Glenn. Attorneys with student debt may be hesitant to take on equity partner position, where a portion of their earnings are based on the firm's performance. "They may not want to have that liability," Mosby-Scott agreed: "Buying in and being an equity partner is a risk."

Mosby-Scott acknowledged it's a risk not everyone is willing to take. "Some women make choices to take a position where it might yield them less income, because they see a benefit we can't put a dollar on." Whether women slow down or step out of the practice, "if it was the path they chose because that gave them the greatest amount of fulfillment personally and professionally, then



Michelle Mosby-Scott in her office.

they chose the best path."

Still, to young women unsure whether to invest in a firm, Mosby-Scott said, "Take the risk. You'll work harder for your clients. You'll do the best you can do if you've got something vested in the business."



**Above:
Ronda Glenn.
Photo by Ken
Kashian.**



**Left: Helen
Ogar in her
historic
downtown
Bloomington
office building.**