



by Danielle C. Lesser

Southern and Eastern Districts of New York Honor Their Four Women Chief Judges

On March 4, the Women in the Law Committee in conjunction with the Southern and Eastern District Chapters of the FBA sponsored Meet the Chiefs. The event, held in the Thurgood Marshall Courthouse in downtown Manhattan, honored the four women chief judges in the Southern and Eastern Districts of New York. The idea for Meet the Chiefs developed from the experience of Olivera Medenica, president of the Southern District Chapter, and Danielle Lesser, chair of the Women in the Law Committee for the Southern District Chapter, at the FBA's Women in the Law Conference in Washington, D.C., last summer. The panelists and discussions at that event highlighted the importance of promoting women's progress in attaining leadership positions in the bench and bar. Medenica and Lesser sought to take that concept to promote the achievements of the chief judges of the Southern and Eastern Districts.

At the New York event, Chief Judge Loretta A. Preska of the Southern District, Chief Judge Carol Bagley Amon of the Eastern District, Chief Judge Cecelia G. Morris of the Southern District's Bankruptcy Court, and Chief Judge Carla E. Craig of the Eastern District's Bankruptcy Court were honored. FBA President Matthew Moreland introduced the evening and touched on the mission of the FBA and the broad initiatives it undertakes on behalf of the judiciary. Medenica introduced Chief Judge Robert A. Katzmann of the Second Circuit. Chief Judge Katzmann's comments touched on the importance of women in the judiciary. Chief Magistrate Judge Frank Maas of the Southern District of New York and Chief Magistrate Judge Steven Gold of the Eastern District of New York then each made a special tribute to the chief judges in each chief magistrate judge's district.

After the introductions, each chief judge spoke of her unique and individual journey to chief judge. Each shared her lessons learned and strategies for success. Chief Judge Preska spoke of her initial pursuit of math and science before deciding that law school made more sense from a career perspective. Chief Judge Amon spoke of being in the right place at the right time, with an



At the March 4 event—(l-r): Chief Judge Craig, Chief Judge Preska, Chief Judge Amon, Chief Judge Morris

opportunity presenting itself after she lamented about how boring her job was to a friend. Chief Judge Craig spent a year reviewing documents halfway across the country and never envisioned herself in her present position. Chief Judge Morris was born in west Texas and worked her way across the country as a clerk and then eventually to New York into a position as judge and then chief judge without any preconceived notions as to where her career would take her. The collective wisdom of these impressive women was to take the opportunity presented, even if that opportunity is not necessarily a perfect match with your ideal career path and although the timing of the opportunity may be inconvenient.

In the face of a challenging environment for women to attain judgeships as well as partnership and leadership positions in law firms and corporations, each chief judge's experience was an individual journey that did not take a traditional path. The evening sent an empowering message to the men and women in the audience. The feedback from the lawyers in attendance was resoundingly positive, and the evening could serve as a template for other events in other FBA chapters around the country. ☺

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