

Sharon J. Wilson: 49th President of the Michigan Lawyers' Auxiliary

It is my honor to serve as president of the Michigan Lawyers Auxiliary, an outstanding group of women dedicated to enriching the word "law" through positive, educational opportunities—individually, within the communities where they live, and collectively, throughout our state.

My "law wife journey" began 43 years ago when R. David Wilson, a tall, good-looking, college student and I got married. We graduated together from Lansing Eastern High School, worked together at the bookstore across from the school, fell in love, and got married after we finished respectively, Lansing Business University and Lansing Community College. We then moved to Detroit, where Dave graduated from Wayne State University in 1968.

Dave began his law career with the Court of Appeals as a law clerk hired by Supreme Court Justice T. John Lesinsky. After writing briefs, more briefs, and even more briefs for about a year, he came home with the news that Ray Scodeller, Ingham County prosecutor, had offered him a job as assistant prosecutor. Thus began Dave's eight years at the Prosecutor's office, culminating as the chief assistant prosecutor when Ray retired. We lost Dave's run for prosecutor in 1976, evoking another of life's lessons: Most politicians are hard working, honorable people, and life's most painful moments are opportunities.

Our children, Jeffrey, Michael, and Kimber, enjoyed all the things Dave's thriving practice provided—most particularly, our cottage at Houghton Lake. As the kids got married and shared with us the loves of their lives and consequently provided us with *grandchildren*, we became the ground beneath their feet. Dave died last year of an unexpected heart attack after almost 30 years in private practice as a labor law attorney for the Fraternal Order of Police; the last 20 he



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spent at Wilson, Lawler & Lett. Accolades surrounding Dave's death illuminated his reputation as a tell it like it is, kick #!!, nice guy, widely respected by his peers, his clients, and his adversaries.

As widows, too, may become president of the Michigan Lawyers' Auxiliary, my law wife journey continues with me behind my computer, welcoming this opportunity to speak as the 49th president of the Michigan Lawyers' Auxiliary. I joined the Law Wives of Ingham County in the spring of 1969, soon after moving back to Lansing and the birth of our second son. My "mom years" were generously sprinkled with volunteer activities, Sparrow Hospital Auxiliary, Law Wives, Michigan Lawyers Auxiliary, school carnivals, and Junior League of Lansing. When our youngest was in first grade, I accepted a six-month temporary position working for Michael Franck, executive director of the State Bar of Michigan, while his secretary took maternity leave. I met Mr. Franck the year before when I was Law Day chairman of MLA. When his secretary returned, I accepted another position with the State Bar, working part-time for the director of communications. Part of my job was overseeing yet another revision of the "You and the Law" booklet.

After leaving the State Bar, I sold real estate in the Lansing area for several years, earning my broker's license in the mid-90s. The last few years I acted as office manager for Dave's practice, managing staff, employee payroll, and billings and overseeing our rental properties. In 2001, Dave and I opened a self-serve car wash in Delta Township, west of Lansing, culminating a college dream and beginning our retirement plan. Our wash received special recognition last year for the flag retirement center erected on its premises, a community project initiated by myself and a young scout working toward his Eagle Scout Merit Badge. More than 500 United States flags have been retired at the center to date. They are recycled to scout troops for flag ceremonies designed to teach proper disposal of our national symbol.

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Finally, a brief history of MLA seems appropriate. The Michigan Lawyers Auxiliary, charter members of the National Lawyers Wives a.k.a. American Lawyers Auxiliary, started with a letter dated January 11, 1956 from Mrs. Richard Mann, president of the three-year-old Washtenaw Bar Association to

LIFE LESSONS LEARNED:

- Time spent wishing to be 16, 21, 30, or 45 is wasted energy.
- Time spent sharing laughter or tears gives life its substance.
- Gossip is a habit that demeans both giver and receiver.
- Inner strength comes from honoring your values, not the moment.
- Acknowledge strengths and weaknesses; neutralize the weaknesses with quality people around you.

Albert E. Blashfield, then president of the State Bar of Michigan. Mrs. Mann offered to assist the Bar in promoting similar auxiliaries in other Michigan cities. Mr. Blashfield replied that the only other Auxiliary he was aware of was the Ingham County Bar Auxiliary (founded in 1936). Bylaws were adopted and objectives were formulated "... through its members, to promote a better relationship between the general public and lawyers; To cooperate with local and state bar associations, To promote the founding and growth of local bar auxiliaries and to promote good fellowship among the families of the members of the legal profession."¹

Those objectives established almost 50 years ago continue as a framework for the community involvement inherent through the Auxiliary.

Our ongoing projects include:

- Assisting the State Bar in the promotion and distribution of the "You and the Law" booklet, a particularly successful tool for introducing young people under 18 to laws as they pertain to them.
- Crystal Apple Award, which is awarded to teachers for outstanding contribution to law-related education.

- Law Day events, including poster contests, court tours, and an essay contest, to name a few.
- Statewide essay contests for students in grades 7–9 encourage youths and their teachers to examine the law as determined by the theme chosen each year by the American Bar Association. This competition is the essence of those original objectives of the Bar Auxiliary. By design, the project includes auxiliaries throughout the state, who promote the project statewide to principals and teachers; incorporates members of the Bar and/or judiciary, who judge the essays; and culminates at a luncheon provided for the winners, their families, teachers, principals, and special guests. Mary Ann Farris, chair of this event, has routinely included Supreme Court justices, senators, representatives, and State Bar officials who serve as host/hostess for the luncheon, putting at least one dignitary at each student winner

table. This is often a once-in-a-lifetime experience for a young person to share lunch with a judge, a Supreme Court justice, or a State Bar president. The Michigan Lawyers Auxiliary takes great pride in providing this opportunity for young people across our state. For more information, contact Mary Ann Farris, Michigan Law Day chairman, at fmaunique@aol.com.

Membership in the Auxiliary includes spouses of attorneys and friends of the law. The \$10 dues help us continue ongoing projects. For more information regarding our organization, contact Nancy Sheldon, membership chair, at n.sheldon@comcast.net or contact me at wilsoncarcleaninglady@yahoo.com. ♦

FOOTNOTE

1. Frances L. Ryan, *History of the Michigan Lawyers Auxiliary* (1956–1985); updated by Mary Ellen Clements (1991).