



2011 MARGARET BRENT AWARDS ANNOUNCED

The American Bar Association Commission on Women in the Profession has chosen five women lawyers to receive its 2011 Margaret Brent Women Lawyers of Achievement Award.

The award ceremony luncheon will take place Sunday, Aug. 7 at the Metro Toronto Convention Center in Toronto, Canada, during the ABA Annual Meeting.

Honorees:

Eleanor Dean (“Eldie”) Acheson of Washington D.C. is vice president, general counsel and corporate secretary of National Railroad Passenger. A graduate of Wellesley College in 1969 and George Washington University Law School in 1973, Acheson was the first woman associate in the litigation department of Ropes & Gray. During her 19 years at the firm, she became a champion for women, devoting her time to *pro bono* cases that included aiding battered women and representing women in a challenge of Massachusetts’ absolute preference for veterans. She argued that case, *Feeney v. Commonwealth*, all the way to the United States Supreme Court. In 1993, she was appointed by President Bill Clinton as assistant attorney general for the Office of Policy Development. In this role, Acheson supported many civil rights issues and helped implement the Violence Against Women Act. She was instrumental in helping Clinton reshape the federal judiciary to “look more like America.” Under her watch, the percentage of women on the United States District Courts almost doubled between 1992 and 2001.

Paulette Brown of Madison, N.J., is partner and the first chief diversity officer of Edwards Angell Palmer & Dodge LLP. For more than 20 years, she has successfully litigated a variety of employment matters including class actions, sexual harassment, marital status, WARN, race and age discrimination and issues pertaining to FMLA. Brown also is experienced in all aspects of workplace training and collective bargaining. She is committed to issues of women and women of color in particular. She is past president of the Association of Black Women Lawyers of New Jersey and co-authored the nationally acclaimed Commission on Women in the Profession Women of Color Research Initiative study, *Visible Invisibility: Women of Color in Law Firms*. Brown has extensively mentored young women, particularly women of color, by providing them with a safe environment to discuss issues affecting them in their firms. As past president of the National Bar Association she led a delegation to monitor the first free and democratic elections in South Africa.

Karen J. Mathis of Philadelphia is president and CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, the nation’s largest donor-based volunteer network of mentors for youth, and a non-profit organization proven to help children of single, low-income and incarcerated parents beat the odds. She joined the top-rated network in September of 2009, after completing a one-year assignment as executive director for the Central European and Eurasian Initiative Institute, a preeminent international non-profit provider of post-graduate professional legal education in Prague. Mathis served as the third woman president of the American Bar Association, where she created the Youth at Risk program to help young people ages 12-19 climb out of the criminal justice system, and a joint ABA-Girl Scouts USA program for middle school girls on law and conflict resolution. She practiced law for 34 years, most recently as a partner of McElroy, Deutsch, Mulvaney & Carpenter, LLP, where she encouraged flexible and part-time work schedules and heavily mentored women in the firm.



Col. Maritza Ryan of West Point, N.Y., is professor and department head of the United States Military Academy. She graduated from West Point in 1982, only the third class to include women, and attended Vanderbilt University Law School, where she was selected for Order of the Coif. She was assigned as military advisor to a brigade of 1,000 soldiers in Saudi Arabia during Operation Desert Shield—the only woman and young mother in the brigade. Ryan was selected as one of only a few military lawyers to attend the staff school at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and chosen by the Army Judge Advocate General's Corps to assume a significant position at the JAG headquarters in Washington, D.C. In 2006, she was named the professor and head of the Law Department, a position requiring presidential nomination and congressional confirmation. With that distinction, she became the first female and Hispanic West Point graduate to be an academic head at West Point in its 210-year history, where she made it a top priority to increase women on the faculty.

Hon. Esther Tomljanovich of Lake Elmo, MN is a former Minnesota Supreme Court justice currently serving on the Board of Directors of Medica. She graduated from St. Paul College of Law in 1955, the only woman in her class, and became the first woman to serve as the state revisor of statutes. In 1977, Gov. Rudy Perpich appointed her as the second district court judge to serve in the state of Minnesota and was later elected as the first woman assistant chief judge in the state. In 1990, Tomljanovich was appointed to the Minnesota Supreme Court, where she was part of the nation's first female majority on a state's high court. During her years on the bench, she founded the Minnesota Women Lawyers Association and served as a member and chair of the Governor's Judicial Selection Commission, where she called for appointments of women to the bench. During her tenure, the number of women judges increased from 15 to 42. She also supported women inmates in prisons and female defendants, speaking out for their dignity and family needs.

Right Hon. Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin of Ottawa, Ontario, is chief justice of the Supreme Court of Canada. She was educated at the University of Alberta, where she received a Bachelor of Arts (Honors) in philosophy in 1965, and a Master of Arts in philosophy and an LL.B, in 1968. The chief justice practiced law in Edmonton for a short time, spent one year in Fort St. John, and moved to Vancouver to practice with Bull, Housser and Tupper. Commencing in 1974, she taught for seven years in the faculty of law at the University of British Columbia as a tenured associate professor. Her judicial career began in April 1981 when she was appointed to the Vancouver County Court. In September 1981, she was appointed to the Supreme Court of British Columbia. She was elevated to the British Columbia Court of Appeal in December of 1985 and was appointed chief justice of the Supreme Court of British Columbia in September 1988. Seven months later, in April 1989, she was sworn in as a justice of the Supreme Court of Canada. On January 7, 2000, she was appointed chief justice of Canada. She is the first woman in Canada to hold this position.

The ABA Women Lawyers of Achievement Award, established in 1991, honors outstanding women lawyers who have achieved professional excellence in their area of specialty and have actively paved the way to success for others. The award is named for Margaret Brent, the first woman lawyer in America. Brent arrived in the colonies in 1638, and was involved in 124 court cases in more than eight years, winning every case. In 1648, she formally demanded a vote and voice in the Maryland Assembly, which the governor denied.

Previous winners range from small-firm practitioners in Alabama and Alaska to U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justices Sandra Day O'Connor and Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Winners are selected on the basis of their professional accomplishments and their role in opening doors for other women lawyers. Bobbi Liebenberg, chair of the ABA Commission on Women, says of this year's Brent winners, "We are honored to recognize a spectacular group of women lawyers and judges. We applaud their achievements knowing that their efforts will inspire a new generation of women lawyers."