

2007 Margaret Brent Awards

Roxana C. Bacon



Roxana C. Bacon's career, spanning over three decades, is a series of "firsts" that collectively have inspired two generations of women lawyers in Arizona. In 1977, Ms. Bacon was the first woman partner at Jennings, Strouss

& Salmon, then the largest firm in the state. She was the first woman visiting professor at Arizona State University College of Law in 1979-80 and has served ever since as an adjunct professor in her two areas of particular expertise, immigration law and professional responsibility. Ms. Bacon was the first woman to serve as chair of the State Bar of Arizona's Admissions Committee on Character and Fitness, the first woman to be selected by Arizona's federal bench to serve as a lawyer representative to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, and the first woman to be elected president of the State Bar of Arizona.

Following a life-changing stint in the Peace Corps in Chile, Ms. Bacon completed college and entered the University of California at Berkeley, Boalt Hall School of Law in 1971. Upon graduation, she was the second woman associate to be hired by Jennings, Strouss & Salmon, where she developed a practice in immigration law—the first such practice in Arizona to provide services in business immigration law.

Arizona is deeply affected by immigration, and Ms. Bacon has been an exceptional leader in this field. She is one of the premier immigration lawyers in the country and was the first woman to serve as general counsel to the American Immigration Lawyers Association in 1993 and to the American Immigration Lawyers Foundation since 2000. She has generously endowed immigration law clinics at both of Arizona's law schools, ensuring that students have opportunities to work with some of the country's most emotionally and intellectually challenging immigration issues (such as gender-based asylum questions).

In 1997, she was a founding partner of Bacon & Dear, a woman-owned firm with an innovative business model that includes the first interactive database for case management and preparation, no billable hours, and a team format for client service. By emphasizing teamwork and relying upon software as its nerve center, this structure rewards lawyers for their legal work rather than its administration. The firm's lawyers are able to work from anywhere at any time, and the resulting flexible schedules and diverse work sites address some of the key reasons women lawyers leave the profession too soon.

While building her national reputation in immigration law, Ms. Bacon was known throughout the state for her leadership in the state bar. She is a founder of the Arizona Women Lawyers Association and in 1991 became the first woman president of the State Bar of Arizona. As president and through her extensive involvement with the bar in other capacities over the years, she established Arizona's first Gender Task Force and led the bar's successful efforts to amend Arizona's constitution to include gender as one of the criteria for merit selection of judges. Her many leadership positions and accomplishments are even more impressive considering the politically conservative environment that existed in Arizona in the 1970s and 1980s. During her rise in the ranks of the bar, she built opportunities for other women. Through her, women found employment in the bar association, support for seeking political office, and more willingness to have them participate in important bar committees.

A true embodiment of the spirit of the pioneering West, in January, 2007, Ms. Bacon became the executive director of Western Progress, a new nonprofit think tank devoted to issues of concern in the American Southwest. Time and again, her colleagues have described her "rock star" charm and her unique talent for building bridges and forming coalitions. She is the personification of the Margaret Brent Award honoree.

Margaret Brent