

Women

Van Slooten and Downing Finish Terms

he still lets you work?’ I respectfully replied, ‘Yes, your honor, and I still let him work.’ The judge’s female clerk stood and applauded.”

In reflecting on her time as international chair, Nancy points to important accomplishments. “We have worked to streamline the efficiency of the Law Society so that it is ready for future international growth,”



she says. “We have encouraged our members to be an influence for good, be a part of their communities, and be leaders in their communities. As people hear about the Law Society, we hope that the members will be known as good people who stand for good things.” Nancy doesn’t think that describing the work of the Law Society as “saving souls” is a stretch. “One mission of the Law Society is buoying each other up spiritually—reaching out to other attorneys, connecting with them, and not just standing by as they flounder.”

balancing professional life with family life. She became the only woman and non-Catholic attorney in the firm. The firm later allowed her to work three days a week at the law firm and three days a week at a CPA firm when she decided to pursue her CPA.

In 1986 Nancy was invited to Provo to meet with Law School officials and other LDS attorneys about beginning a professional organization. In 1987 the J. Reuben Clark Law Society was formed. Nancy joined the charter national board of the Law Society along with 16 others. John Welch, Sr., a board member and a senior partner at Latham & Watkins in Los Angeles, became the chair of the Los Angeles Chapter of the Law Society, with Nancy as his assistant.

Nancy began volunteering in the Law Society when she was single and practicing law and has continued to serve throughout her courtship and marriage and while raising children. She and her husband adopted three children from Russia, two from Ukraine, and one from California. After bringing the two babies home from Russia, she resigned from her firm partnership and began part-time work—15 hours a week with one day each week in the office—fulfilling Dean Hansen’s assertion that lawyers set their own schedules.

Nancy was the chair of the Los Angeles Chapter when her family moved to Georgia. She then became part of the Law Society’s International Board, where she promoted chapter events, assisted in the compilation of the Law Society handbook, and helped set up committees.

In 2001 Bill Atkin, then international chair, asked Nancy to set up the new international

student chapters. In just six years there were 75. Serving as the chair-elect of the executive committee in 2007, she became the international chair in 2009 and will complete her term in October 2011.

Through her work with the student chapters, Nancy has developed a deep love for the students and for mentoring them. As an entering law student Nancy had a chance encounter with an LDS attorney on a bus in Los Angeles. He invited her to his office and told her some of his experiences of negotiating the analytical and skeptical attorney traits in his professional life with being teachable and open to the Spirit. Nancy felt blessed by that encounter and looks with satisfaction at similar mentoring opportunities between students and attorney mentors affiliated with the Law Society.

As the first female international chair of the Law Society, Nancy is no stranger to having to stand up to be heard. Her law school class was composed of only 10 percent women, and she was the first woman partner at her law firm. From her early years in practice she tells this story: “I had been appearing before the same judge in the probate court for many years (he was known not to approve of women attorneys, but I knew he respected me anyway), presenting myself by saying, ‘Good morning, your honor. Nancy Stevenson appearing for the petitioner.’ The first court appearance after my marriage I presented myself by saying, ‘Good morning, your honor. Nancy Van Slooten appearing for the petitioner.’ The judge stopped the court and asked, ‘Did I hear a new name? Are congratulations in store?’ I said, ‘Yes, your honor, I recently got married.’ He responded, ‘And

AFTER 25 YEARS OF SERVICE

Nancy Stevenson Van Slooten, ’83, international chair of the J. Reuben Clark Law Society, never even thought about attending law school. She was in the BYU accounting program intent on joining the MBA program after returning from her mission. One of her accounting professors suggested law school, so Nancy called Reese Hansen, then dean over admissions, who encouraged her to apply. He touted law school over business school: “A lawyer with an accounting degree can do what an MBA does, but an MBA can’t do what a lawyer does.” He also said that women should be lawyers and doctors rather than nurses and secretaries because “they set the work schedules and can earn more money with less time away from the family.” She was accepted to both programs but chose law school.

Amid the stresses of her first year she was called to be Relief Society president in her student ward, where she learned to balance the needs of the sisters with her rigorous law school schedule. The blessings came after she graduated and was hired at a Los Angeles firm, where she took over the retiring senior partner’s practice on a four-year partnership track. In the first interview Nancy stated her priorities for

of Influence

in Law School Organizations > BY JANE H. WISE



ALWAYS LEARNING

After 20 years in the workplace, Tani Pack Downing, '91, president of the BYU Law School Alumni Association, is surprised when she is the only woman in the room. It used to be the rule, but things have changed a little. "People sometimes did not know I was a woman until they met me," she says. "I guess because of my name." Tani remembers an experience from working at her first law firm: "We had a deposition scheduled, and when the opposing attorney, who was a man, showed up, he asked me if I was the court reporter. When I told him who I was, he seemed surprised. He had been expecting a man."

There were only a couple of women attorneys in the first two firms Tani worked in. When she began working for state govern-

ment, closer to half of the attorneys working for the legislature were women.

This is a change from when Tani was growing up. Her best friend's mother was the only woman she was acquainted with who worked outside the home—as a high school teacher. "She always had piles of books at the side of her chair or bed," Tani recalls. "I was inspired by her. Not only did I prepare myself for a profession—going to college like she encouraged me to do—there are 30 books now stacked at the side of my bed. There are biographies, historical works, and Church books. I want to always be learning."

Tani says her career path has been nothing she could ever have scripted. Her first job was as an associate with Alverson, Taylor, Mortensen & Nelson in Las Vegas. Her husband was a Marine, and when his next assignment came as a posting in Hawaii, she found a job with a law firm in Honolulu. At the end of her husband's service the family moved to Utah, where Tani was hired as an associate general counsel to the Utah legislature. Seven years later she began in-house work at an up-and-coming high-tech firm, but when the tech bubble burst, Tani was part of the layoffs. She was subsequently hired as the general counsel and director of appeals for the Utah Department of Workforce Services. After Governor Huntsman was elected, he appointed her as its executive director. A few years later the governor appointed her to be his deputy chief of staff and

general counsel in the governor's office. The job demanded 60 to 70 hours per week, and she was always on call. After Huntsman was appointed ambassador to China, she heard about a position for state risk manager and asked for Governor Herbert's blessing to move into that position so that she could spend more time with her family. She has been working there since August 2009.

Tani has been president of the BYU Law School Alumni Association since 2010 but has been involved almost since graduation. When she was only a few years out of law school she volunteered to be class representative, and she later became the chair of the events committee. In 2008 she was elected vice president of the Alumni Association—during a board meeting she didn't attend. She learned of the appointment when Mary Hoagland sent her a congratulatory e-mail. She was surprised but happy to continue serving. Tani became president-elect in 2009 and president in 2010. As an immediate past president when her term ends in fall 2011, Tani will still sit on the Alumni Executive Committee.

As president, Tani has focused on making connections with alumni in each region, and she has made it a priority to connect alumni to the Law School. Several initiatives have been to use social media, to link the alumni newsletter with the Law School's web page, and to add videos to the newsletters. She wants new graduates to feel immediately part of the Alumni Association and to serve on committees and as committee chairs, since they are the future leaders of the organization.

In the tough job market, Tani encourages alumni to feed potential jobs into Career

Services for new graduate placements. She beats the bushes for clerkships, internships, and externships for the 2Ls. "It is important to keep the doors open for the people coming behind us." In another Alumni Association hiring initiative, alumni throughout the country have been asked to host Dean James Rasband at their law firms. His presentations focus on the Law School and its students—their high LSAT scores and grades, where they've come from, and what their plans are; the credentials of the faculty and the new faculty; and the new building projects at the Law School. Tani hosted one of these presentations at the Utah State Capitol, where all the state attorneys attended. Tani says, "It is very exciting to bring the Law School into law firms and offices and let others see what is happening there. It is very impressive."

Unlike her earlier law firms, Tani has always seen women active in the Alumni Association. Two other women, Mitzi Collins and Wendy Archibald, have also served as presidents. She believes there is great value in participation for both men and women because of the networking and professional associations inherent in this service. "I have grown close to people I didn't know in law school. Some of my closest friends have come through my service to the Alumni Association."