



## Mothers in Law

By Adrienne Schofhauser

With the number of women attorneys on the rise across the nation, the most surprising thing about a mothers' support group for local attorneys may be that it wasn't conceived earlier.

Mother Attorneys Mentoring Association of Seattle (MAMAS) is the 1-year-old brainchild of Rachel Black, a commercial litigation lawyer at Susman Godfrey. Frustrated by the lack of advice for attorney moms, Black developed a network of women attorneys who were going through—or had made it through—the stressful years of child-rearing.

"I initially envisioned an organization where, just once a month, a bunch of women would meet at a venue where their children could play and the women could socialize, network, problem-solve, and learn from each other and find mentors," says Black, 38, whose son, now 2½, was born the year she made partner, and whose daughter is 3 months old.

Black's e-mail sharing her idea to co-founder Lorraine Lewis Phillips (Keller Rohrback) traveled quickly, and MAMAS' first meeting was attended by 50 women. "I looked around the room and said this is a group that needed to happen," says Lori Lynn Phillips of Heller Ehrman, a MAMAS board member and mother of 7-year-old triplets and a 5 year-old.

Since then, 325 members have registered, and attendance has topped 80 women. Monthly discussion topics have included how and when to inform clients of a pregnancy, traveling while breast-feeding and strategies for work-life balance. Every event has been sponsored by members of the legal community.

"The comment that I get most from women when they find out about the organization is: 'I can't believe these aren't all over the country. I can't believe that this is only one year old.' I mean, they're really surprised," says Black.

MAMAS members have about 500 children in all, including 55 born during the group's first year. MAMAS has already born fruit of its own: Similar organizations have been launched in New York and San Diego, and one is soon to sprout in Honolulu.

"One of the main goals is just to build a network so that you don't feel alone in this endeavor," says Phillips, 39. "In some of the firms, there aren't enough of a critical mass for women to feel like they have somebody they can go to."

Many firms are struggling to accommodate the changing routines of their attorneys who become mothers.

"They're trying to figure out how to manage their [women attorneys'] needs—their desire to be involved with their families—verses the needs of the practice," says Mary Re Knack, a member at Williams Kastner.

Last October, MAMAS held its first annual banquet. A panel discussion tackled the issue of diversity in the legal community. Local judges answered questions and volunteered anecdotes of their child-rearing experiences to a crowd of about 100 women (and three men). Many women face a Catch-22 between advancing at their firms and tending to family affairs.

If law firms value their women attorneys, they're going to have to work harder to accommodate them, says U.S. District Court Judge Ricardo Martinez.

"The practice of law has put incredible demands on people in terms of time," he says. "Sometimes traditional things are slow to change, and we [lawyers] are our own worst enemies when it comes to that."

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