

It is the mission of GAWL "To enhance the welfare and development of women lawyers and to support their interests."

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## The GAWL Leadership Academy Taps First Class

GAWL is pleased to announce that it has accepted its first class for the Leadership Academy for 2008. It's About Leadership 2008 is the first-ever selective leadership academy hosted by GAWL.



The purpose of Leadership Academy is to train and support an elite group of GAWL members who will be rising into leadership positions in Georgia's legal and business communities. Participants will receive 20 hours of hands-on training from the most influential leaders in Georgia

GAWL is please to announce the inaugural class of It's About Leadership, the GAWL Academy:

**Janine Bowen** - McKenna Long & Aldridge (Atlanta)

**Janet Bozeman** - Hyatt & Stubblefield, P.C. (Atlanta)

**Catherine Coppedge** - AFLAC (Columbus)

**Stephanie Crosse** - AFLAC (Columbus)

**Sherry Goodrum** - Lee, Goodrum & McAllister (Columbus)

**Dana Grantham** - Smith Gambrell & Russell (Atlanta)

**Tracey Hawkins** - Synovus Financial

Corp. (Columbus)

**Holly Hempel** - Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough (Atlanta)

**Elisa Kodish** - Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough (Atlanta)

**Amy Kolczak** - Owen, Gleaton, Egan, Jones & Sweeney (Atlanta)

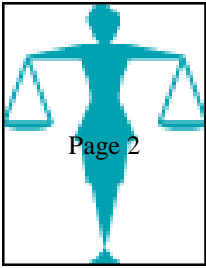
**Cristina Leon** - The Partners Group (Atlanta)

**LaRae Moore** - Office of the District Attorney (Columbus)

**Catherine Salinas** - Carlton Fields (Atlanta)

**Kelli Wolk** - Moore, Ingram, Johnson & Steele (Marietta)

**Heather Wright** - The Wright Firm (Atlanta)



## What's In A Maternity Leave Policy?

*Not all policies are alike.*

*Don't assume that your firm provides twelve weeks of paid leave. Consider your maternity leave like any other term of employment and negotiate, negotiate, negotiate. Here are some tips to consider when seeking leave with your firm.*

Next Monthly Meeting is  
Jan. 22d  
At Noon  
At Twelve at  
Atlantic Station

Visit  
gawl.org  
regularly.

Forward this newsletter or an e-blast to a friend!

In Norway, working mothers enjoy a full forty-two weeks of fully paid maternity leave. Unfortunately, we are not in Norway. Under federal law here in the United States, all firms or companies with fifty or more employees are subject to the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which ensures that full time employees are given twelve weeks of unpaid time off

to care for an immediate family member, such as a newborn or newly adopted child without risk of losing their jobs. Whether the twelve weeks are paid in full or in part or not at all is up to each employer. Employers that do not meet the threshold number of employees vary in the policies offered. It is a good idea to approach your firm or company as early as possible to find

out the established policy, if any, and discuss your options. In preparing for the negotiations, consider the following questions:

### **How much time can I take?**

The most common policy is up to twelve weeks of leave with varying degrees of pay. Some firms that provide for twelve weeks paid leave will allow an employee to take an addi-

tional number of weeks unpaid. Ask ahead of time about your options for additional leave beyond the typical period in the event of necessity, or even if you just want more time. An important question to ask your firm is when does the leave clock start ticking? What happens if you must begin your maternity leave before the baby arrives due to bed rest or other preg-



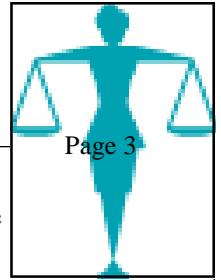
nancy related complication? Some firms will start the twelve week clock ticking on the first day of bed rest, thus shortening your time at home with the baby. Find out about your firm's short term disability plan, which can provide additional time and pay for complications before birth.

Disability may kick

in to cover your salary while you are on bed rest, or allow you to take a longer leave than offered by your firm. You also can ask your firm about using sick leave and vacation time that may have accrued to extend the total number of weeks.

### **How will my firm compensate me during leave?**

Of course the best option is full



time salary for the entire amount of your leave. Some firms and companies base availability upon your tenure, allowing twelve weeks paid leave if you have been employed for at least one year. Other firms do not even label it "maternity leave" but instead consider it disability leave. Ask for paid leave first. If your firm does not provide fully paid leave, disability pay can make up some of the difference. Six weeks is the standard amount of time covered for pregnancy under most short term disability plans. Private short term disability plans generally pay between 50 and 100 percent of your salary for a certain number of weeks, depending on how long you have worked for your firm. Ask if your firm will cover any amounts not paid through the disability plan. If you end up needing more than the standard twelve weeks, ask about your firm's long-term disability policy, which may apply to provide you with partial salary.

Again, using accrued vacation or sick leave is an option. For example, if your firm offers six weeks paid leave, you can negotiate an additional two weeks paid leave for accrued vacation, and the remaining weeks unpaid. To help with the burden of unpaid leave, you also can ask your firm to spread out the weeks that are paid across the total number of weeks of leave to ensure that you receive at least some pay throughout the entire time away.

### **Is there any flexibility in returning to work?**

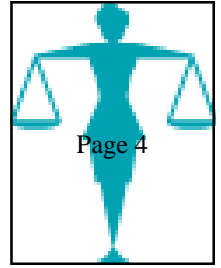
Coming back from leave does not have to mean being ready to go full blast on the first Monday morning after your leave expires. Consider giving yourself some time to acclimate to practicing law and raising a child. There are other options, such as a mixture of paid leave with a reduced hours schedule upon your return. For example, if your firm only offers six weeks paid and you cannot forego your salary, ask to start back at the seventh week working from home on a part-time basis for the remaining six weeks (or even more if you can get it) with a gradual increase to full time. Or, if you start back immediately in the office, ask your firm for a period of flexible hours, such as working a certain number of hours in the office, and finishing up the remaining billable hours at home after the baby goes down. Don't call it "part-time," which some firms will balk at, instead call it flexibility, saving your sanity, or even just taking time to ramp back up.

The key to negotiating your maternity leave is think outside the typical twelve weeks box and make a proposal to your firm that makes sense for you. Research your options by talking to colleagues at your firm who have taken maternity leave about their experiences, including their own negotiations. Ask lawyers at other firms of similar size what kind of policy their firm offers and use it as an example. You may be surprised at how interested your firm is in what its competition is offering. Be prepared to market yourself in the meeting with the powers that be by arming yourself with an evaluation of you, including a list of your accomplishments, billable hours, clients or business brought in, etc., that will demonstrate to your firm why you are worth the leave you are seeking. Anticipate objections that your firm may have. Reassure your firm that the wheels will not fall off the bus during your absence and provide your firm with a plan for handling your workload. Remember that you never know what you are going to get until you ask.

**Christian Torgrimson is an eminent domain lawyer with the law firm of Pursley, Lowery Meeks LLP. Christian is President-Elect of GAWL and heads up the GAWL Working Moms Affinity Group. She can be reached via email at [ctorgrimson@plmllp.com](mailto:ctorgrimson@plmllp.com)**

*Don't call it  
Part-time.  
It's flexibility.*

## Giving Back By Lisa S. Schrage



As the holidays approach, I find myself reflecting on the year and all that I have to be thankful for. I have a wonderful husband, a beautiful little boy, a (fairly) successful career, I am healthy and I am happy. I am truly a blessed person. Not everyone can claim that in their lives. Unfortunately poverty and homelessness is always prevalent and charitable opportunities to help those in need are endless.

Volunteer groups and non-profits give much to the community, but they cannot do it alone. They need our time and our money. Undoubtedly, we are busy people and our time and money are both limited and valuable. However, as successful members of the community, we have a responsibility to give and help those less fortunate than us. We are mentors to those in our community, in our schools and to our children. Our actions influence and teach those around us, as well as help build stronger communities and contribute to the common good. Charitable outreach can not only be good of you, but good for you. As attorneys, giving back to your community can increase your visibility with the public, help build positive relationships with those in the community and turn into referral sources.

Feel motivated but overwhelmed with the choices available? Whether you chose to donate money or volunteer your time, decide why giving is important to you. Becoming clear about your values will help you chose how and to whom you will give. In *Inspired Philanthropy*, authors Tracy Gary and Melissa Kohner write: "Knowing what you feel passionate about is the first step in determining where your personal contributions of time, money, and energy will feel most effective" [2002: 20]. When considering what really matters to you, find a focus for your giving. If you have a passion for children, consider volunteering at Hughes Spalding Children's Hospital or donating money to Atlanta Children's

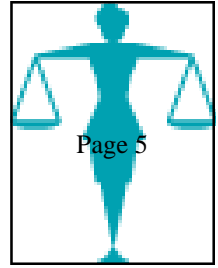
Shelter. If your faith is important to you, contact your church or synagogue and ask if there are any volunteer opportunities available. A great online resource is [www.volunteermatch.org](http://www.volunteermatch.org). Through this website, you can input your location and interest areas to help you connect with an organization that needs volunteers.

Often times you do not have to look far to find a way to reach out to the community. Your answer may be sitting right across from you - your clients. I practice workers' compensation, representing the injured worker. Each year I have at least one client living in a shelter or an extended stay hotel during the holidays because they just cannot make ends meet and cannot afford a place to call home. I pick one current or past client who is clearly in need and give them a gift basket which includes a gift card to a local grocery store. When you give, encourage your employer and co-employees to give too. "Adopt" a local charity and invite your firm to match employee donations. Put a bin in your kitchen area and collect canned and non-perishable foods to donate to a local soup kitchen. At your office holiday party, ask co-employees to bring one small toy to be collected and given to a local shelter.

'Tis the season for giving and there are many ways you can give back to the community. Take some time and do some good. Whether you are donating time, money or gifts, your contribution is important to your community and to society.

Happy Holidays!

## Congratulations! GAWL tops 1000 members!



Over the past several years, GAWL has focused on expanding its program offerings, penetrating the judicial nominating process, and creating a greater presence in all corners of the State of Georgia.

Recently, GAWL hit a milestone: we topped one thousand members!!



The GAWL Board celebrated with a bit of cake with their frosting.

Congratulations to all members for growing the organization and increasing its relevance for women lawyers of every generation—from law students to retirees.

Make a commitment to get more involved in 2008!  
[www.gawl.org](http://www.gawl.org)

### Support GAWL's Sponsors

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