

LEADING LAWYERS NETWORK

MAGAZINE | **WOMEN'S EDITION**

MARCH 2008
LEADINGLAWYERS.COM
\$4.95

**THE TOP WOMEN
LAWYERS IN ILLINOIS**



STEELY RESOLVE

**PATTI BOBB: TOP-NOTCH LITIGATOR
BREAKS INTO THE OLD BOYS CLUB**

Ginny Aronson: Opening
Doors for Clients and Women

Roxane Busey: International
Leader In Antitrust
Counseling & Litigation

Ann Tighe: Thrives on
Helping the Underdog

PATTI BOBB

Using Grace and Finesse to Reach Top of Trial Bar

by John Flynn Rooney

Patricia C. Bobb had little female company when she graduated from law school in the early 1970s and none when she began prosecuting felony cases here several years later.

But she did not consider that a disadvantage. "Being a woman at the time I was coming up as a trial lawyer was an enormous benefit to me," Bobb said. "My philosophy was to do my best and prove my capabilities as a lawyer and I think people came to respect me in that regard.

"I showed people that I wanted to work hard and that I wanted to try cases," Bobb continued.

Between 1970 and 1974, there were less than 500 women among the more than 5,000 registered Illinois lawyers, according to figures kept by the Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission. As of late fall 2006, of the 81,146 registered Illinois lawyers, 33 percent were female, the commission's 2006 annual report shows.

Chicago lawyer Lorna E. Propes met Bobb when Propes worked as a law clerk in the Cook County State's Attorney's Office in the 1970s. The two women later became law partners and Bobb is now also counsel to Propes' law firm, **Propes & Kaveny LLC**, in addition to her work primarily representing plaintiffs in medical malpractice cases for her own firm, **Patricia C. Bobb & Associates**.

"Patti decided to enter the field of courtroom advocacy at a time when there were quite literally no women trial lawyers in town," Propes said. "Yet, she was able to succeed in two-male dominated settings," earlier in her career as a prosecutor and plaintiff personal-injury lawyer.

"She did this not only by being a talented trial

lawyer but by working harder, working longer and working smarter than the guys had to work to make it in those arenas," Propes continued.

"Her other great strength was she was able to be aggressive enough to open these doors without causing friction or raising the hackles of those who never expected to see women in the role of trial lawyer," Propes added. "She won them over fair and square and everyone came to respect her and because of that, she really opened doors for other women."

Propes concluded, "She did it with grace and finesse."

When asked how she became accepted in a male-dominated profession earlier in her career, Bobb replied, "By deciding I would just have to work hard and prove myself capable

away and say, 'What a terrific person,'" Demetrio said.

Chicago lawyer Richard H. Donohue, who has known Bobb for more than 25 years and opposed her in cases, said that Bobb is used to being treated the same as anyone else. She wasn't intimidated by being in a male-dominated environment, he noted.

"She can be with the boys (and) still be a lady, but is not cowed or intimidated by being in that environment," Donohue added. "She's been able to adapt over time and continue to be very successful in her field and her peer group."

Legal Roots In New Mexico

Bobb, 60, was born in Roswell, New Mexico. She was the oldest of Jack and Ruthanne

"The thing that I love about what I do is when you're successful in getting compensation for people who have been injured or died, you really feel you've made a difference in someone's life."

and the rest would fall into place."

She also tried to display a sense of humor to counteract teasing from men.

"You just learn to laugh about it and not to take most things too seriously," Bobb added.

Chicago lawyer Thomas A. Demetrio, who worked with Bobb in the late 1970s, said her "gender was a non-issue." Male trial lawyers accepted her because of her competency and her pleasant personality, he added.

"You cannot meet Patti Bobb and not walk

Campbell's four children. She still returns to New Mexico regularly to visit family.

"I love going back, but I don't think that I could live there just because I love the city and Chicago so much, I'd be a little bored," Bobb said.

Her father was a trial lawyer who later became involved in New Mexico politics and was elected as a Democratic governor of that state in the early 1960s. Bobb, her two brothers and a sister were all involved in



politics from a young age. Their mother was a housewife who also participated in her husband's political life.

Bobb met Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, along with Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey.

"I think of all the siblings, I was the one who really enjoyed it the most," Bobb said. "I would go on campaign trips with my Dad into tiny towns in New Mexico...where everyone spoke Spanish.

"It was very exciting," Bobb added. "We were in the public eye a lot. But the opportunities we had were wonderful."

Bobb also recalled as a child accompanying her father to court when he worked as a lawyer representing clients in matters involving laws related to oil and gas.

"I just always wanted to be a lawyer from the time I can remember," Bobb added, noting that her father was encouraging and supportive of her interest in the legal profession. "And there weren't many women lawyers at the time."

Bobb received her undergraduate degree from St. Michael's College, now the College of Sante Fe. A friend of her father's who was a Notre Dame Law School alum urged her to enroll there.

So, she did and was among 24 women that started at the law school in 1969. But only eight women graduated three years later.

"At the time, it was just a very, very tough road for women," Bobb said.

While at Notre Dame, Bobb also met her fellow classmate and husband Robert J. Bobb Jr., who was from Blue Island, Illinois. The couple married right after they graduated from law school and are now divorced.

Their daughter, Brooke Elizabeth Bobb, 21 is a junior at Boston University.

Robert Bobb is now a Chicago entrepreneur, who buys and sells businesses and they remain close friends, she said.

The couple returned to Chicago from South Bend after Robert Bobb took a job as a law clerk for a federal appeals court judge.

But Patti Bobb had no job lined up here.

"I knew no one in Chicago (and) had no connections, no clout," she added.

After passing the Illinois bar in 1972, Bobb applied for work at a number of places, including the Cook County public defender's office, where she had wanted to work.

She instead landed a job as an Assistant Cook County State's Attorney. There were few women working in the office at the time, she said.

Her initial assignment was in the Criminal Appeals Division. For most of the women working in the office, the next move was to Juvenile Court.

Bobb said, however, that she let officials in the State's Attorney's Office know that she

eventually wanted to work in a trial courtroom, rather than in Juvenile Court.

So, Bobb was assigned to branch courts, including those located in the old Chicago Police Department Headquarters at 1121 S. State St.

"There had rarely been, if ever, any women assigned to those courtrooms at the time," Bobb said.

The calls there involved myriad charges, such as pornography, spousal abuse and various misdemeanors.

"I would tell people if my father knew what I was exposed to every day, he would be stunned," Bobb said laughing. "It was life in the big city, the flotsam and jetsam of criminals."

Bobb said she was dubbed the "Iron Butterfly" in a 1970s newspaper article.

She reveled in working as a prosecutor.

"Being a woman at the time I was coming up as a trial lawyer was an enormous benefit to me."

"You had to learn to think on your feet," she added. "You had to learn to put witnesses on. That probably was a better experience in life developing street savvy than any education I

ever could have gotten.”

Bobb later landed an assignment in a felony trial courtroom at 26th Street and California Avenue. Bobb added that she was the only female prosecutor working in a felony trial courtroom for about a year.

The highest-profile case Bobb prosecuted involved Patty Colombo, who was 19 when she was charged along with her 37-year-old boyfriend of murdering her parents and younger brother.

“At the time, it really caught the interest of

“I showed people that I wanted to work hard and that I wanted to try cases.”

the public and the press because of the whole seemingly normal suburban family and this very young girl gone bad,” Bobb said. “No one could really get their minds around that.”

Bobb continues to testify against the release of Columbo and her co-defendant when they are up for parole before the Illinois Parole Board.

The Columbo case marked another time when being a woman helped, Bobb said.

“I think that was one of the many times in my career when my gender helped tremendously because I think the powers that be when they were putting a trial team together decided maybe it would be a good idea to have a woman on the team because of Patty Columbo,” Bobb added. “No one ever articulated that to me but

being associated with as a trial judge.”

Bobb “was thoroughly prepared, honest (and) always above board,” Pincham continued. “If she told me the sun wasn’t going to rise in the morning, I would know the sun isn’t going to rise in the morning.”

“My experience (as a judge and lawyer) was tremendously enhanced by my being associated with her,” Pincham concluded.

Looking back, Bobb said she had the most fun in her career prosecuting cases.

“It was exciting,” Bobb added. “I was in court all the time and to have that experience at such a young age was phenomenal.”

From Criminal to Civil Cases

After working as a prosecutor for six years and serving as a felony supervisor, Bobb decided to leave the State’s Attorney’s Office.

Bobb talked to numerous people about her next move. She determined that plaintiff personal-injury law would allow for the most opportunity to try cases.

So, in 1978, Bobb was hired at Philip H. Corboy & Associates, now known as Corboy & Demetrio P.C. She was exposed to medical malpractice and other civil cases for the first time and remained there for two years.

“I was really starting from scratch because I didn’t have any background in civil law,” Bobb said.

She worked on medical malpractice cases with one of her mentors, Philip H. Corboy. Bobb believes the experience she gained at Corboy’s firm in two years was equal to about five years’ experience elsewhere.



Bobb with her daughter Brooke, a junior at Boston University.

Dooley had.”

Bobb appeared before Donald P. O’Connell, former Cook County Chief Circuit Court judge, hundreds of times during his 23 years on the bench.

“She was a very creative lawyer and very tenacious,” O’Connell said. “She came across in the courtroom as tenacious but sensitive.”

“I think her prior years in the State’s Attorney’s Office trying felony cases...then her mentoring from Phil Corboy made her into the tough-but-caring, damages-enhancing lawyer that she was and is,” O’Connell said, adding that she “was always warm, considerate and respectful to her opponents and the judge.”

In 1980, she co-founded a law firm with three colleagues from the State’s Attorney’s Office and remained with Bobb, Kane, Obbish & Propes for five years.

In 1983, Time Magazine named Bobb as one of five “Outstanding Female Trial Lawyers in the Country.”

Two years later, Bobb struck out on her own.

“Running your own firm gives you a lot of independence and a lot more responsibility, particularly when your practice is plaintiff personal injury where you pay the overhead and you pay the case expenses, you pay staff and have to bring business in,” Bobb said.

“The thing that I love about what I do... (is) when you’re successful in getting compensation for people who have been injured or died, you really feel you’ve made a difference in someone’s life,” Bobb added.

In the 1980s, Bobb obtained a \$1.3 million



Bobb is pictured with three of the five Women CBA Presidents in the organization’s 140 year history; Jennifer Nijman, Joy Cunningham, Bobb and Laurel Bellows

it was pretty clear. That was fine by me.”

Then-judge R. Eugene Pincham presided over the Columbo trial in 1976 and said Bobb “is one of the most gracious, one of the most learned, one of the most fair prosecutorial advocates that I have ever had the pleasure of

Demetrio, now a name partner at Corboy & Demetrio, said Bobb “was able to adapt to the world of medical negligence lawsuits very quickly. What I saw in her was the same intensity in preparation that Corboy always claimed [Corboy’s mentor the late James A.]

verdict for the death of a rookie Chicago firefighter stemming from a high-rise fire in downtown Chicago.

"That was probably one of the most rewarding cases I had," Bobb added, noting that she also represented two other firemen who were seriously injured while fighting the blaze.

The rookie firefighter's family lived in the Beverly neighborhood on Chicago's Southwest Side.

And while Bobb is a transplanted Chicagoan, "I'm a South Sider really," she said. "The people from the South Side are...just wonderful people."

Among Bobb's other significant results are a \$3.4 million settlement for a birth injury a child suffered resulting from a delay in delivery, and a settlement valued at \$6 million for an 8-year-old girl who suffered a severe injury at birth.

Bobb also has done defense work representing Catholic clergy in cases alleging sexual misconduct and represented defendants in some civil rights cases.

She currently represents the family of a 42-year-old mother of two young daughters who died after hospital staffers failed to treat a brain cyst. The allegations against the University of Chicago Hospitals settled for \$4.2 million, but other defendants are expected to take the matter to trial, she said.

Bobb has tried more than 100 bench and jury trials in federal and state courts.

"The most challenging thing about our practice right now is that from our side, we're pushing to get to trial and the other side is resisting," Bobb said.

"What I love is being in a courtroom," she added. "It's just harder to get there."

Bobb said she works seven days a week and puts in long hours when preparing for trial.

"It's a very intense kind of practice," Bobb added.

Medical malpractice cases have become increasingly difficult to handle because, among other factors, it is harder to get expert witnesses to testify, according to Bobb.

Bobb is "at a point in her career, where she can focus her efforts on a few significant cases," Donohue said.

"I think she is a superb lawyer," added Donohue, a principal of Donohue, Brown, Mathewson & Smyth in Chicago. "I think she is

very smart and I think one of her greatest strengths, in my mind, is she can see the trees through the forest.

"She's able to see the issue and jump on," Donohue continued. "She's very good to deal with because you don't waste a lot of time on side issues.

"She's smart (and) she knows where she's going," Donohue concluded.

Beyond the Courtroom

In addition to her practice, Bobb also has been involved in bar-related and civic activities.

Bobb noted that she followed the example set by her father, who was very service- and people-oriented.

Bobb is a past president of the Chicago Inn of Court. She is a fellow of the International Society of Barristers, the International Academy of Trial Lawyers and the American College of Trial Lawyers.

She was active with the Chicago Bar Association for nearly 20 years prior to serving as that group's third female president in 1997-98.

"I did it primarily because of the service aspect and to give back to the profession," Bobb said of the CBA. "Also, because I wanted to get known and potentially get new business and meet new people."

She also served a stint as chair of the board of the National Institute of Trial Advocacy.

Bobb served on the Illinois Supreme Court Rules Committee, including a stint as chair. In late 2007, she completed service as a commissioner for the Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission.

Since 1998, Bobb has served as a member of the Chicago Police Board, which played a role earlier this year in the hiring of new Chicago Police Superintendent Jody Weis.

In addition, Bobb has been a panelist or speaker at hundreds of bar-related programs during her career.

Bobb's outside activities extend beyond the legal profession. She is a member of the Chicago Network, an organization of prominent professional women in the city.

"I find because it's [involvement in the Chicago Network] non-legal, it's fascinating to meet and interact with women in other professions," Bobb said. ■