



**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY BAR
ASSOCIATION
YOUNG LAWYERS DIVISION
& HILLSBOROUGH ASSOCIATION FOR
WOMEN LAWYERS**



The Florida Bar Young Lawyers Division Awards Committee
Brittany Dix, YLD Award Chair
Reno Pierre, YLD Award Chair
c/o Tom Miller, Program Administrator

Via Online Submission

Re: Nomination of Deborah Larned Werner for the Florida Bar YLD Mentor of the Year Award

Dear Ms. Dix, Mr. Pierre, Mr. Miller, Members of the Young Lawyers Divisions Awards Committee, and Young Lawyers Division Board of Governors:

The Hillsborough Association for Women Lawyers (“HAWL”) and the Hillsborough County Bar Association Young Lawyers Division (the “HCBA YLD”) are proud to jointly nominate Deborah Larned Werner for the Florida Bar YLD *Mentor of the Year Award*. It would be hard to find anyone more passionate about mentoring than Ms. Werner. She has not only contributed substantial time and efforts toward mentoring young lawyers and law students herself but has also promoted mentoring and made it possible for others to serve as mentors. Ms. Werner was the founding Chair of the HAWL Mentoring Program and ran the program for many years. Even after she handed over leadership of the Mentoring Committee, she has continued to serve on HAWL’s Mentoring Committee and as a mentor through HAWL’s program. She has also been a leader of and participant in numerous other mentoring programs. Ms. Werner epitomizes what it means to be a good mentor, a true professional, and a role model.



Accolades to Ms. Werner

Our organizations have received a truly extraordinary amount of support for this nomination. After the request for their testimonials for Ms. Werner was put out to her colleagues, friends, and mentees, we received an overwhelming number of responses. As of the date of this submission, we have received testimonials for Ms. Werner from dozens of people, totaling 48 pages. To avoid exceeding the submission limitation, the testimonials we received have been compiled into one document, which is attached. The originals are available should the committee wish to review them. The fact that this many busy lawyers, judges, and professionals took the time to share their admiration for Ms. Werner demonstrates in a very concrete way the impact she has had. The comments themselves demonstrate the extremely high regard in which Ms. Werner is held by those who know her.

Also included in this nomination packet is an article that was published in the HCBA *Lawyer Magazine* when Ms. Werner received the inaugural Thirteenth Judicial Circuit Professionalism Award in 2014. Better yet please view the “Star Wars” themed video at <http://www.debwernerlaw.com/bliss.html>, highlighting Ms. Werner’s mentoring contributions, which earned her this recognition. This is not the only “first” for Ms. Werner. In 2010, Ms. Werner was in the inaugural group of “Leaders in the Law” recognized by the Florida Association for Women Lawyers (FAWL). The Leader in the Law Award recognizes outstanding women lawyers who have made significant impacts in their communities and have been a positive role model for other FAWL members. Ms. Werner was also the first person to receive the “Friend of HAWL” Award, after it was presented posthumously to the longtime HAWL Board member it was named after, the late United States Bankruptcy Judge Thomas Baynes. The Baynes Award recognizes someone who has faithfully demonstrated a commitment to HAWL and the purpose, goals, and mission of HAWL. Ms. Werner has also been HAWL’s Mentor of the Year, and in fact is the only person to have received that award more than once.

Ms. Werner’s background

Ms. Werner’s history of leadership, excellence, and mentoring began early. She was the first person in her family to graduate from college. She worked her way through college at the University of South Florida, volunteered extensively while in college, and held a district leadership position with a community service organization, yet graduated first in her major, with a B.A. in Social Science Education. Ms. Werner initially went to work for the federal government in the Social Security Administration and worked her way up to a position as a claims representative, where at the age of 22 she was responsible for authorizing each month more than a million dollars in benefits. Ms. Werner reports that this was likely the beginning of her “mentoring” career, because she developed a habit of taking students that came to work for the agency “under her wing,” creating and sharing resources with her team members, and spending much of her time helping them solve their “problem cases.”

After a few years working for the federal government, Ms. Werner went to Stetson University College of Law, where she graduated with a J.D. in 1983. While at Stetson, Ms. Werner was part of the Mock Trial and Client Counseling teams. Ms. Werner has served in the leadership of the Stetson Alumni Association, including serving as the first female President in the Association’s history. She served for many years on the Stetson College of Law Board of Overseers and for more than three decades on the USF Stavros Center for Free Enterprise and Economic Education.

Ms. Werner initially went to work for a firm, but within a few years had launched her own practice. She has practiced for several decades as Deborah Larned Werner, PA, focusing her practice on probate, trust administration, estate planning, guardianship, elder law, and real estate transactions. About making the leap to start her own firm, Ms. Werner said, “if being a role model is part of mentoring, then I would like to think that quitting the firm and starting my own practice, was certainly a part of my mentoring career.”

Ms. Werner’s long history of dedication to mentoring.

As noted, Ms. Werner’s history of mentoring started even before law school. Since law school, it has only grown. It is typical of Ms. Werner’s modesty that when she is asked about her support for mentoring, she does not start with what she has done as a mentor, but with talking about

how grateful she is for the wonderful mentors she has had, which have led to lifelong friendships. It is clear she has made the decision to pay that forward.

While Ms. Werner has demonstrated a long-standing commitment to mentoring in multiple contexts, the strongest focus of her mentoring has been with young lawyers and law students. As noted above, Ms. Werner founded HAWL's mentoring program. The program began in 2002 as a mentorship program for HAWL members. Ms. Werner implemented several innovative ideas, including bringing in a professional speaker to provide learning modules; setting up a "Mentoring for the Moment" or "Mentoring Resource Bank" in which members identified areas for which they were willing to share their knowledge on topics ranging from being interviewed on television, to starting a new practice area, to becoming a new mom; and a "Peer Mentoring" program. The HAWL Mentoring Program quickly expanded in 2004 when Ms. Werner teamed up with the then-President of the Florida Association for Women Lawyers at Stetson (FAWLS), Kate Eggleston (now Bradford) to create the HAWL/FAWLS Mentoring Program. The program paired law student mentees with HAWL members, and included mixers, learning opportunities, and culminated with a dinner at the end of the year to celebrate the mentees graduating from law school.

Ms. Werner continued as the HAWL Mentoring Chair for many years. Under her leadership, the HAWL Mentoring Program continued to grow, and received statewide recognition. Then in 2010, Ms. Werner was privileged to represent HAWL in San Francisco at the National Conference of Women's Bar Associations Annual Meeting, to receive on behalf of HAWL a national programming award from the NCWBA for HAWL's Mentoring Program.

Ms. Werner has since stepped down to give new leaders the opportunity to run HAWL's Mentoring Program, but has remained on the Mentoring Committee, and has continued to take mentees through the program, including often taking multiple mentees when there are more mentees than mentors available. The program has continued to grow and innovate. It now includes students at the Tampa campus of the Thomas M. Cooley Law School as well as Stetson law students, and has implemented new programs, including Job Shadowing and Courthouse Tour events. Ms. Werner always encourages her mentees to participate in these and other events, and often accompanies her mentees to these programs.

Something that really makes Ms. Werner stand out as a mentor to law students and young lawyers is that, along with sharing her wisdom and insight, Ms. Werner has also been willing to share her expertise. For a number of Ms. Werner's law students or young lawyer mentees who are interested in her practice area, she has hired them to work for her on a part-time basis. Ms. Werner has had over 20 law students or lawyers she has mentored that also became employees of her law firm. She teaches these mentees how to draft legal documents including estate planning, probate, real estate, and elder law documents. She discusses with them some of the issues that make this a challenging area of the law. She also shares with them pragmatic advice, such as the importance of stepping away from your work to be able to review it with fresh eyes, or better yet, having another person review it as well.

For all of her mentees, Ms. Werner invites them to her home to have lunch and get to know them – not only their professional interests, but who they are as a person, and their background, hopes, and dreams. She lets them know that, regardless of the length of the program they are in, she is their mentor for as long as they need or want her to be – basically forever. And she follows up on that by staying in touch with her mentees, for some of them literally decades later, sending birthday greetings,

and for some, even attending their weddings! She and her mentees often become precious “forever” friends.

Although Ms. Werner has been integrally involved in the HAWL Mentoring Program, that is not the limit of her involvement in mentoring. She has been on the committees or a participant in numerous mentoring programs, including the HCBA Mentoring, Taskforce, the Florida Bar’s Mentoring Program, Justice Teaching, and the Thirteen Judicial Circuit’s “Mentor Me” Program, to name just a few. She is currently serving on HAWL’s Leadership Academy.

Community Involvement

Ms. Werner is also involved in the community outside of her bar association involvement. She is active in Working Women of Tampa Bay, Business and Professional Women, Network of Executive Women, and ABLE, to name just a few. In 1994, Ms. Werner received BPW’s Woman of the Year Award. Ms. Werner has often included her mentees in these organizations’ events and has paid their way so that they could attend without cost being a concern. Additionally, through BPW and NEW, Ms. Werner helped to raise scholarship funds and to recommend students that needed financial support. She was in BPW for over 30 years, and during that time, BPW gave more than \$151,000 in scholarship monies. Many of the scholarship recipients were law students.

Photographs

Along with everything else Ms. Werner does, she is a wonderful amateur photographer. She can be found at virtually every bar association event she attends with her camera – making her an unofficial historian of our organizations. A compilation of photos Ms. Werner has taken over the years of her precious mentors and mentees, and photos that have been taken of her with her mentors and mentees is available at <https://photos.app.goo.gl/qthMkdeYRuUugY6J6>.

Ms. Werner’s own words

Ms. Werner’s passion for mentoring is shown best by her actions, and her love for mentoring also shines through her words. Asked to describe what mentoring has meant to her, Ms. Werner stated the following:

Mentoring has been the gift that keeps on giving in my work and in my life. It’s fun to share what I have learned in almost 40 years of practicing law. Mentoring is simply about relationship building, something we all do for our entire lives. For me, mentoring is at the very heart of my life. It is really just about love-as is almost anything in life that is really important. I simply love mentoring. I love the people that have mentored me, and I love the people that I mentor. Lucky for me, they love me back. LOVE! LOVE! LOVE! What could be better than that?

Ms. Werner’s actions and words have made her an inspiration to a full generation of lawyers, or more.

Conclusion

For these reasons, HAWL and HCBA YLD believe Deb Werner exemplifies the qualities of an Outstanding Mentor, and we recommend her to the Florida Bar YLD for this recognition.

Sincerely,

Lyndsey E. Siara
Katherine Earle Yanes
Chairs, HAWL Awards
Committee

*[NAMES – who will be signing for
HCBA YLD?],*
Chairs, HCBA YLD Awards
Committee