



Teresa Fariss McClain

Key player in startup of Minnesota Women Lawyers' Foundation

When Minnesota Women Lawyers last summer launched its own charitable foundation, that startup was largely due to the efforts of Minneapolis attorney Teresa Fariss McClain.

"I have no doubt, that had it not been for Teresa's perseverance and leadership, the Minnesota Women Lawyers Foundation would not exist today," said Debra Pexa, MWL executive director. "Teresa not only set her goal high, but she understood how valuable the MWL Foundation would be to the mission to advance the success of women attorneys and strive for a just society."

The foundation's startup culminated more than two-year campaign by McClain, first serving as MWL's president-elect in 2012-13 and then as its president in 2013-14. For this achievement, Minnesota Lawyer is honoring McClain as a 2014 Minnesota Attorney of the Year.

The road to the foundation began with McClain serving as co-chair of a MWL task force to see if forming a charitable arm made sense, and then gaining board support in 2013 to incorporate the charity as a 501c3 corporation.

"Upon that initial approval, Teresa further supported the effort during her year as president, by establishing yet another MWL task force to lead the painstaking process of actually forming the charitable corporation," Pexa said.

McClain said she felt creating the foundation was important for the MWL.

"Our mission is to work to promote equity for all women in the law and work for a just society," McClain said. She noted the foundation gives the MWL a vehicle to carry out its charitable work in such areas as fighting domestic violence, participating in the Girl Scout Law Day outreach and offering scholarships.

At the start of 2015, McClain joined the Robins Kaplan law firm in Minneapolis as of counsel, practicing in the areas of medical malpractice and personal injury. Before pursuing the legal profession, McClain was a registered nurse, working in obstetrics and adult critical care that included serving as a patients' advocate.

Nevertheless, "I have always been interested in the law," McClain said about switching careers. "I really see what I am doing as similar to nursing. I am advocate for the client but just in a different realm.

"I like the challenge of putting the medical field and the law together to achieve a just outcome for my clients," she said. McClain added serving injured patients gives her the opportunity to champion their causes. "They [the clients] need someone to bridge the gap between the medical and legal systems."

—Scott Carlson