

Gay Woodhouse is the new State Bar President

by Dave FEATHERLY

"It all started at a 5000-watt radio station in Fresno, California...", Ted Baxter of the Mary Tyler Show used to say.

Well, it didn't start at a radio station or in California for Wyoming's new State Bar President but it did start in the current Elks Lodge in Torrington, Wyoming. At the time of Gay Woodhouse's birth, the Torrington hospital was in that building and the new hospital came on board less than two years later when her younger brother was born in the current hospital.

Her mother, Sally Vanderpoel, author of three books including a biography of another famous Huntley resident, Stan Hathaway, filled me in on the some of the details of the young life of Gay Woodhouse and her voice swells with pride when she talks about this daughter who was, in school, "always into everything." When asked if Gay were shy or retiring as a youngster, her mother laughed and said, "oh, no, she was also curious about everything and never shy."

Gay started school in Torrington, where her father was a State Farm Insurance agent for 41 1/2 years and the family moved to rural Huntley, eight miles away, when she was started fifth grade. She graduated with a dozen other students and all went on to college, including one who attended the Naval Academy.

Her mother told me that she had been in the position to be a "stay-at-home-mom" after having taught school for three years and could dedicate her time to activism. She is particularly proud of, with a dozen other women, starting the special education program in Torrington.

While the school buildings remain in Huntley, students are now bused to other towns for their education. Gay's grandfather was the architect for the oldest of the school buildings, being paid \$2.00 an hour for his services.

In the late 1970's, school boards of Huntley and Goshen Hole (Yoder, Veteran, and Hawk Springs students) were merged into one school, which was located in Yoder and is known as Southeast. The first classes began in 1980 as Southeast, with the first graduation in 1981. The junior and senior high schools in LaGrange were merged into Southeast in 1992 and it remains the only high school in southern Goshen County.

After high school, Gay Woodhouse matriculated to the University of Wyoming, where she earned a Bachelor's in 1972 and her J.D. in 1977.

She is a member of the Wyoming Bar and has been admitted to practice before the U.S. District Court, District of Wyoming and the U.S. Supreme Court. Gay served as Assistant United States Attorney and Wyoming Attorney General. She has recently assumed the position of President of the Wyoming State Bar Association.

In addition to becoming State Bar President in 2007, Gay was recognized as a Distinguished Alumni for the University of Wyoming College of Arts and Sciences.

Her personal and professional accomplishments are too numerous to list in this story but she has served on the board of directors of what is now PEAK Wellness Center, Pathfinder, Inc., Prevent Child Abuse Wyoming, Safe Harbor, A Children's Justice Center, Attention Homes, Inc. and Rotary Club of Cheyenne.

She is married and has two sons. She gives much of the credit for her ability to dedicate the time and effort to her legal pursuits and professional and personal involvements to her husband Randy.

I first laid eyes on Gay Woodhouse at a Cheyenne City Council meeting. She had opened her private practice in Cheyenne in July of 2001 and I had begun publishing the Cheyenne Herald in January of 2002. I had taken an editorial position in the second issue of the Herald about the annexation of Village West being illegal and Gay had been retained by aggrieved neighbors to represent their interests in both an illegal rezoning of the land and the annexation itself. Betty Cox and Ann King, ranch owners west of the city were principal litigants.

For this story, I contacted Betty Cox and asked her how she had come to retain Gay - what with Gay being fairly new in private practice here in Cheyenne. Mrs. Cox told me that she and her late husband Mark had been represented by former Wyoming Governor Stan Hathaway but he was nearing the end of his legal career and didn't want to take on new cases. Asked to refer someone, he told Betty that she should retain Gay Woodhouse. Governor Hathaway said he had lived across the street from the Woodhouses in Torrington and had known Gay for almost all her life and she would do a great job.

Boy, did she ever!

That first night, at city council, when the time came, Gay strode to the podium on the left side facing the governing body, pulled the microphone neck down to accommodate her height and proclaimed, in a voice larger than her size, "Gay Woodhouse, representing the neighbors." From that moment on, Gay Woodhouse has been considered the "Champion of the People."

I have dubbed her "the Terminator," because, time after time, the end for the City has not been what they expected or coveted. Gay and her law firm have been successful against the city on rezoning, annexations, sewer line back-ups, wrongful termination of employment and other legal challenges. Gay does not tilt at windmills. She does not take cases for the retainer and hourly billings - she takes them to prevail - to win.

I was recently contacted by a woman who had a story to tell and during the conversation, she told me she had retained an



Incoming Wyoming State Bar Association President Gay Woodhouse of Cheyenne is congratulated by outgoing President Joe Bluemel of Kemmerer at the swearing-in ceremonies which were held on September 13, 2007 at the Four Seasons Resort at Teton Village, Wyoming.

attorney. I asked her who. She said Gay Woodhouse. Expecting her to credit Gay's ad in the Herald, I asked the caller "why"? She said Gay's ad in the yellow pages had influenced her - she said Gay looked like someone who cared. Gay does care. Her ad's tag line, "Liberty and Justice for All" is sincere. And true.

Some have told me that the Cheyenne Herald coming along when it did has served this community well, that they don't know where we'd be now without it. While flattered, I believe it was fate that brought us Gay Woodhouse when it did. That it has been her advocating for the people,

championing their causes when they were wronged, that has made Laramie County a better place to live. Had she said "No" to Mrs. Cox and Mrs. King, as so many local attorneys do when approached to litigate against the City, I shudder to think where we'd be today.

I have met many during the last five plus years because of the Cheyenne Herald. Many I would never have met otherwise. Gay is likely one of those. It has been an honor to make her acquaintance and align with her on many legal battles. There could be no better choice for State Bar President. Congratulations, Terminator.

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