

Remembering Susan Hammer, Treasured OWLS Member

By Elise Gautier

OWLS mourns the death of Susan Hammer, a treasured OWLS member and civic leader. She died on August 26 in Portland at age 71. Susan is pictured at right with Gretchen Kafoury (1942–2015) and Justice Betty Roberts (1923–2011) at Betty's book signing event at the Oregon Historical Society in Portland in 2008.

Born in Salem, Susan was a graduate of South Salem High School, the University of Puget Sound, and Willamette University College of Law. She practiced law at Stoel Rives in Portland from 1978 to 1998, becoming a partner there in 1984. After leaving Stoel Rives, she conducted her own mediation practice in Portland for 20 years, receiving national recognition and mediation awards.

Susan was a longtime OWLS member and supporter, and she ran an ad in nearly every issue of the OWLS *AdvanceSheet* for 18 years. You can see video of Susan and other early OWLS leaders at a 1991 brunch [here](#). As a member of the OWLS Foundation Legacy Society, Susan left a generous bequest to the OWLS Foundation.

"As citizens, we have an obligation to make this city better," Susan said at an OWLS event in July 2008. She, indeed, made Portland better.

Susan served in volunteer leadership positions within the legal profession and the wider community for decades. She was the first woman president of the Multnomah Bar Association, in 1987–1988. She served as president of the Portland City Club (2006–2007), board chair of Planned Parenthood Columbia Willamette, and on the boards of several other major nonprofits in Oregon. She was the first recipient of the Planned Parenthood Susan Hammer Award for Transformative Leadership (in 2011) and one of the earliest recipients of the Oregon Commission for Women's Women of Achievement Award (in 1987). She received the Multnomah Bar Association Professionalism Award in 2006.

As president of the Multnomah Bar Association (MBA), Susan enlisted Katherine O'Neil to chair the MBA's Committee on the Status of Women in the Legal Profession. Its work ultimately led to women lawyers deciding, at the women's bar breakfast held at the October 1988 Oregon State Bar conference, to form a statewide group. Oregon Women

Lawyers was incorporated just a few months later, on March 31, 1989.

When the president of the American Bar Association came to Portland in 1987, [Susan recalled](#), he held a meeting with lawyers at an exclusively male club in Portland. Although Susan and Ellen Rosenblum (now Oregon's attorney general) objected to the meeting's excluding women, the location was not changed. "*The Oregonian* picked up the story and ran it as a news article, an editorial and in Jonathan Nicholas' column," Susan explained. "The meeting place didn't change but we felt vindicated. We also had a lot of fun with it!"

When Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg visited Willamette University 21 years later, in 2008, Susan escorted her. Susan's



Photo: Jodee Jackson

From left: Gretchen Kafoury, Justice Betty Roberts, and Susan Hammer in 2008

article about that visit was published in the Winter 2009 issue of the OWLS *AdvanceSheet*. It is reprinted in this issue as a tribute to Justice Ginsburg and to Susan. Both remarkable women will be sorely missed.

You can learn more about Susan from [her obituary at OregonLive](#).

Elise Gautier, a freelance editor and "inactive" bar member, has edited the OWLS *AdvanceSheet* for the past 18 years.

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