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By RHONDA CROWDER
Staff Reporter

Since gaining the right to vote and the onset of the liberation movement, women have made some very significant contributions to almost every profession known to man.

They are truly climbing ladders and shattering glass ceilings.

And, a perfect example of their accomplishments can be seen within our judicial system.

For the third time in the state's history, women are in the majority on the Ohio Supreme Court as Maureen O'Conner, Evelyn Lundberg Stratton, Judith Ann Lanzinger, and Yvette McGee Brown are four of the current seven justices. At the same time, O'Conner is the first female chief and McGee Brown is the first African-American woman to serve on the bench.

"We realize we are an image and example," said O'Conner, who made it clear that, despite being the majority on the Supreme Court, women are still underrepresented in the appellate, trial, and municipal courts as well in leadership positions – as managing partners – in law firms.

Because of that under representation, they believe it's important to encourage women to stay in field of law. "It is powerful for other women to see us on the court. It's important for them to see what's possible," said McGee Brown.

Stratton, who knew she wanted to and would become a judge since graduating from law school, has served the Supreme Court since 1996 and remembers her female predecessor speaking of being the only woman on the bench and having to prove herself in this 'good ole' boys network. She said having other women makes a difference. It takes away the pressure of having to feel a need to compete.

With the exception of Stratton, none of the ladies thought they would one day sit on the Ohio Supreme Ohio. They attribute obtaining the position as taking advantage of the opportunities presented them over the course of their careers.

"You don't know what's around the corner. Make a name for yourself by being highly competent," said O'Conner. "If you prepare now to do the best you can, you'll have the tools to take advantage of any opportunity that present its self."

Lanzinger believe you have to jump at opportunities even when you are surprised by them.

When asked what they would like their Ohio Supreme Court legacy to be, McGee Brown said she's wants to be remembered as a good jurist.

O'Conner, wanting to be a good jurist as well, wants to change the institution in meaningful ways, particularly in the way it's funded. She also wants to re-consider issues surrounding the death penalty, business court docket, and how they address the needs of society. She's especially interested in how children interact with the courts and how the courts interact with the school systems.

Lanzinger wants to be seen as a good writer, one who delivered the work of the court in an understandable manner and provided good principle decisions.

"I want them to say she did her job well," she said.

Stratton wants to be remembered as one who championed mental health issues and focused on veterans in the court system.

Thinking about the demands of the legal profession as well as being a wife and mother, we asked O'Conner, McGee Brown, and Lanzinger how they managed to juggle it all.

McGee Brown said her husband, who is a school teacher, made it easy for her to have this career. Lanzinger said she was very fortunate to have a supportive husband as well.

O'Conner, a single mother with two boys since they were 8 and 9 years old, had jobs that were conducive to her being a mom.

"There're always challenges for women that are different," said O'Conner. She also said law firms are becoming better at allowing partners to parent by balancing professional and personal lives.

Lanzinger thinks it is those challenges that allow women to bring their flexibility to leadership

positions, that they have learned to multi-task and prioritize.

But Stratton, the first women to be elected to Franklin County Court of Common Pleas, offered a statement the really put it in perspective. She said women are actually the privileged gender, in that they can choose to have a career or stay at home with the children. Either way, society blesses them. Whereas, men who choose to stay at home, are viewed as lazy. "Women should embrace their freedom," she said.