

# Commission

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**Fall 1997**

## What Does the Commission for Women Do?

*Our purpose, according to the establishing bylaws, July 1981, is to advise the Board of Supervisors. In full, we: "Make recommendations to the Board on issues impacting an/or relating to women, coordinate efforts with Federal State and local community groups to improve the quality of life for women, and serve as a referral agency for persons experiencing unfair practices as a result of gender, health, family status". In addition, we conduct studies or tasks assigned or approved by the Board of Supervisors.*

*At our Commission retreat we have re-focused our attention to this stated mission, and will have goals and an action plan for the coming year that reflect that focus. The third part of our mission—acting as a referral agency—will be fulfilled by a listing of the numbers and addresses of the "One-stop" centers and the kiosks available for clients or community groups to access information about help available for women and families within the County.*

*These will be posted on our web page: <http://www.ventura.org/cfw-home.htm>. The Workforce Development Division of Ventura County has provided us with an extensive list. Eventually, WDD will have its own web page, and we will have a hypertext link.*

### One-Stop Centers

635 S. Ventura Road, Oxnard 93030  
Tel. # 38206551

980 Enchanted Way, Suite 105, Simi Valley 93065  
Tel. # 579-1732

*In addition, there are child care, community services, education, employment, medical, mental health, housing, job training, veterans and social service referrals posted on our web site, <http://www.ventura.org/cfw-home.htm>*

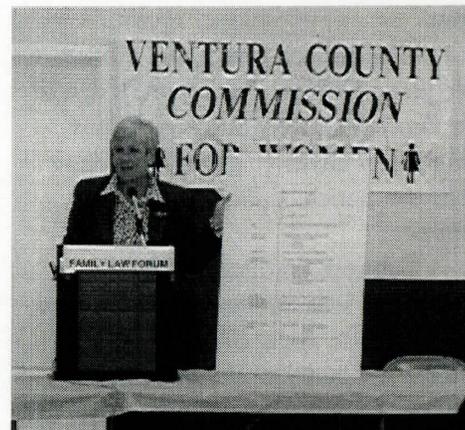
## Family Law Forum

The annual Family Law Forum, co-sponsored by the Commission for Women and the Ventura County Family Law Bar, is a day of information and education about the many issues surrounding divorce. Although emotionally charged, these issues are ultimately settled by laws which every woman should know something about. Various community professionals—attorneys, judges, district attorney representatives, mediators and deputy sheriffs—share their expertise and give general, or in some cases, very specific advice, whether the problem involves child custody arrangements, support or non-support issues, community property or even domestic violence concerns.

The May 10, 1997 Family Law Forum, the eighth annual, was held at the Santa Paula Boys and Girls Club, thanks to Diane Koranda, Executive Director of that organization. Forum Moderator was again Susan Witting, Family Law attorney in Thousand Oaks.

The program began with "...In the Beginning...What do I do?" Gay Conroy, Attorney Family Law Facilitator for the Ventura County Superior Court informed the audience about the Ventura County Pro Per Clinic Program, a weekly drop-in session of advice and help for women who might not be ready to consult an attorney, but need questions answered.

*(Cont'd on next page)*



## Who Are The Commissioners?

### District 1 (Susan Lacey)

Ruth A. Hibbard  
Monica McGrath  
Roberta Payan

### District 2 (Frank Schillo)

Mara Antos  
Karen Gorback  
Vacant

### District 3 (Kathy Long)

Judy Cunningham  
Lois Harrion  
Sharon Hillbrant

### District 4 (Judy Mikels)

Bonnie Warrington  
Lori Zafiropoulas  
Eileen Gordon

### District 5 (John Flynn)

Bea Gan  
Eliza Thomas  
Ruth Ann McAllister

We hope to fill the remaining vacancy soon and be a full, active commission.

**(Family Law Forum,***cont'd from front page)*

Next, Cathleen Drury, Thousand Oaks Attorney specializing in Family Law, presented "Community Property Issues and Rights."

Richard Abbey, Family Relations Mediator from the Ventura County Superior Court gave an overview of "The Mediation Process—an Inside View."

After a lunch break, the Honorable Judge Colleen Toy White, Judge of the Ventura County Superior Court, Family Law Division, gave "The View from the Bench: Child and Spousal Support."

"Support Enforcement and Collection" was addressed by Charles Stanley Trom, Assistant District Attorney, County of Ventura, Child Support Division;

"Domestic Violence: Perspective from the Sheriff's Department" presented by two representatives of the Ventura County Sheriff's Department.

Susan Witting then gave the final conclusion to the day. Ms. Witting is a past commissioner for the Ventura County Commission for Women and currently serves on various advisory committees in the county. Witting's areas of emphasis in her practice of law are family law and estate planning. The reason she's involved in Family Law Forum:

"I believe everyone should know what their rights are and how to exercise them. I believe that women are still second-class citizens in today's society and that one way to help them achieve parity is to ensure that the average women is as aware of her rights as the average man. I do not believe that this is the case at this time. Many, many laws guaranteeing women equality have been passed and are on the books. Women as a whole are unaware of their existence or how to see that they are implemented. I see this

constantly in the cases passing through my office, especially in the areas of community property rights, spousal support, credit law and much, much more. This is true not only for women involved in litigation but of the community at large.

I saw this when I taught a course at Moorpark College titled 'Women and the Law'. The women in the course were intensely interested and soaked up everything I could give them. It proved to me that women in general are not getting the information they need about their rights or how to exercise those rights. Thus, the Family Law Forum. This day long seminar will concentrate on divorce and related family issues. It's a place to start."

In spite of articles in the local paper and the efforts of Diane Koranda in spreading the word, the turn-out for this year's Family Law Forum was small. Nevertheless, the Commissioners are convinced that it must continue to hold this annually, that valuable information is presented, and the answer to small audience turn-out is to hold the event at a facility that has a built-in audience, such as an adult school, where those needing the information would be in training. The Commission is grateful to all those involved for giving their time and expertise freely. Commissioners Bonnie Warrington and Mara Antos spent a great deal of time before and during the day to organize and expedite the event.

## SUSAN WITTING

*Attorney at Law Susan Henrichsen Witting completed her undergraduate work at the University of Colorado, Boulder and attended law school at Pepperdine School of Law at Malibu. She is a partner in a Thousand Oaks law firm, Henrichsen & Witting.*

*Susan has served as moderator for the Family Law Forum, as well doing a great deal of the organizing, for the entire eight years the Commission has sponsored the Forum. She has contributed in many areas to her community: the City of Thousand Oaks Planning Commis-*

*sion, chairman of the Open Space Subcommittee of the General Plan Review Committee for the City of Thousand Oaks, various positions for the Thousand Oaks Branch of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), the PTA and the Thousand Oaks and Ventura County Republican Women's Clubs. She is a past commissioner for the Ventura County Commission for Women and currently serves on various advisory committees in the county.*

*Witting's areas of emphasis in her practice of law are family law and estate planning. She has been a Ventura County resident since 1959. She and her husband, Dan, have two daughters: Leslie and Kaitlin.*

*In a past interview she stated why she continues to be involved in Family Law Forum:*

*"I believe everyone should know what their rights are and how to exercise them. I believe that women are still second-class citizens in today's society and that one way to help them achieve parity is to ensure that the average women is as aware of her rights as the average man. I do not believe that this is the case at this time. Many, many laws guaranteeing women equality have been passed and are on the books. Women as a whole are unaware of their existence or how to see that they are implemented. I see this constantly in the cases passing through my office, Especially in the areas of community property rights, spousal support, credit law and much, much more. This is true not only for women involved in litigation but of the community at large.*

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# The First Sojourner

Sojourner Truth was born about 200 years ago--no one knows the exact date, since she was born into slavery in Ulster County, New York. She had been given the name Isabella with the last name of whatever man owned her. She was a woman of deep religious faith and conviction. When freed by the 1827 anti-slavery law in New York she became an active abolitionist. At the time she was gaining her freedom, one of her 13 children, a son, was sold illegally into slavery in Alabama. She fought back with a lawsuit, and won her son's freedom. In 1843 she changed her name to Sojourner Truth, saying she had been told to do so by God. She joined the Methodist Church--although the Quakers had been leading the abolitionist and women's rights movements, they would not let her sing--and became a traveling evangelist.

She rode streetcars in Washington, D.C., even though she was continuously thrown off, until the law was changed to allow negroes to ride. She forced her way in to speak with President Lincoln at a public event, to tell him her ideas on ways to employ the newly freed slaves. Armed with a deep voice, a commanding presence, quick wit and unswerving courage, she became a famous orator, traveling in the east and midwest, speaking against slavery and for women's rights. In her travels and speeches she was often spat upon, stoned and beaten. But her simple yet compelling words often shamed people when she talked about the evils of slavery. Her most famous speech was at the 1851 Convention on Women's Rights in Akron, Ohio. In this speech she demolished the idea that women were weak and had to be helped and protected from the rigors of politics.

## Ain't I A Woman?

*Delivered 1851 at the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio by Sojourner Truth*

Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. I think that 'twixt the negroes of the South and the women at the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this here talking about? That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman? Then they talk about this thing in the head; what's this they call it? [member of audience whispers, "intellect"] That's it, honey. What's that got to do with women's rights or negroes' rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half measure full? Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him. If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the

world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them. Obligated to you for hearing me, and now old Sojourner ain't got nothing more to say.

([www.cse.ogi.edu/~fisher/st.html](http://www.cse.ogi.edu/~fisher/st.html))

During one of her speeches in 1858, a pro-slavery medical doctor led the crowd in demanding that she prove she was a woman by letting her breast be examined. With her deep bass voice, tall height and strong spirit, she had been accused of being a man. She quietly opened her dress, saying she had fed many a white baby with her breast, though her own children had been denied it. Would they too want to suckle at her breast, she asked.

How proud we as women should be to have before us an example of such courage in the face of so much adversity! And how fitting that the little explorer traveling up and down the Mars surface, sending back information that may one day be ordinary knowledge to every child, should be named after a woman who had the courage to point out what should have been obvious to every human.

