

Working For Women

Initially formed to network, the Inland Empire Legal Association of Women is expanding its reach and services. **BY TAMMY MINN**



FROM LEFT: Marcie Gardner, president; Laura Crane, board member; Goldy Berger, treasurer; and Karen Zermeno Feld, vice president.

PHOTOGRAPHY: AUBREY NOELLE

As president of the newly formed Inland Empire Legal Association of Women (IELAW), Rancho Cucamonga attorney Marcie Gardner has already seen the group's purpose expand.

"At first it was about networking with each other, but we realized that we're also interested in advocating for the needs of women in the Inland Empire," says Gardner, a University of Redlands graduate. She attended law school at UC Davis and was admitted to the state bar in 1997. She launched IELAW in January 2009 by sending out e-mails and flyers asking if anyone was interested in forming such a group. "About 50 women showed up at that first meeting," she says. "I couldn't believe the interest. Women from across the legal community responded, coming from big firms, large firms, solo attorneys, public interest attorneys, county government employees. It was great," she adds.

They spent the better part of last year organizing, drawing up by-laws and zeroing in on a focus. "Our mission is to advocate for the concerns of women in the community and to promote female attorneys and bench officers in the Inland Empire," Gardner says. But the most unifying theme was community service and outreach. "It's something we all feel very strongly about. We asked ourselves, what can we contribute as a group?" she says.

They didn't waste time. Within a few months, the group sponsored several events. One was a mock trial at a "disadvantaged school" in San Bernardino. Another was a holiday party at Operation Safe House in Riverside. U.S. District Judge Virginia Phillips of Riverside recently spoke to the group at its anniversary dinner.

Meetings are held monthly and membership is open "to anyone who's invested in the legal community, not just attorneys," Gardner says. "We even have a few men," she adds. Annual membership dues are broken down on a tiered schedule, topping at about \$75. For more information contact Gardner at (909) 635-2028.