

The Section's First Annual Shira A. Scheindlin Award for Excellence in the Courtroom

By Jaclyn H. Grodin

The Section has long embraced women's leadership within its own ranks and throughout the legal community at large. On November 14, 2016, the Section confirmed that this tradition will continue into the future with the presentation of the first annual Shira A. Scheindlin Award for Excellence in the Courtroom by former Section Chair, the Honorable Shira A. Scheindlin, to former Section Chair Carrie H. Cohen, a partner at Morrison & Foerster LLP. Cohen, formerly an Assistant United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, who received the inaugural award in recognition of her successes as a dedicated trial lawyer and continued commitment to advancing women in the legal profession.

Cohen first thanked the award's namesake, Judge Scheindlin and expressed gratitude for being selected as the first recipient of an award honoring a jurist from the court Cohen considered her home, the Southern District of New York. Recalling how she first got hooked on trial work as a young associate at the firm Vladeck Waldman, Cohen also recognized the many people who had helped shape and develop her career over the years, including judges, mentors, supervisors, partners, former colleagues, and friends, many of whom were in attendance at the awards ceremony. In particular, Cohen recognized the important role that Chief Judge Judith S. Kaye, who passed away in January 2016, had played in her life, and the guidance Judge Kaye provided over the many years of their friendship. She also thanked current Section Chair Mark Berman, and the award selection committee, comprised of former Section Chairs Bernice Leber, Steve Younger, and the Honorable P. Kevin Castel, in addition to Judge Scheindlin.

Cohen rounded out her acknowledgments by thanking her family, whom she recognized as patient, loyal, and her biggest fans in and out of the courtroom. The recipient concluded her remarks by giving words of advice to litigators at the start of their careers, and particularly younger women attorneys beginning to face some of the challenges

Cohen had previously encountered: help others, use your legal skills to their fullest potential, and, most importantly, say yes to *every* assignment, *every* new opportunity, and *every* invitation to join a bar association or committee.

The awards ceremony featured prominent jurists from the federal and state benches, each confirming Cohen's place as a leader among New York litigators. In addition to Judge Scheindlin's presentation of the award, Judge Denny Chin of the Second Circuit Court of Appeals, Chief Judge Colleen McMahon of the Southern District of New York, and Chief Judge Dora Irizarry of the Eastern District of New York offered words of praise and congratulations to Cohen. Although she could not attend the ceremony in person due to commitments in Albany, Chief Judge DiFiore sent a letter commending the Section for creating the award and for choosing Cohen as the award's first recipient. Chief Judge DiFiore praised Cohen's accomplishments as a public servant and ability to serve as a supportive mentor and role model for women seeking to make their own mark in the law.

In a similar vein, Judge Chin recalled getting to know Cohen when they both worked at Vladeck, supervising her first deposition, and officiating at her wedding. In recognizing the traits that made Cohen so successful—her professionalism, confidence, energy, positivity, and her balance—Judge Chin repeated the sentiment of the evening's other presenters and honored Cohen for embracing all of the best that lawyering and litigation have to offer. More importantly, Judge Chin confirmed that Cohen's continued pursuit of excellence in the courtroom and throughout her community, and her dedication to her family and friends, made Cohen a model recipient of the first Shira A. Scheindlin Award for Excellence in the Courtroom. The audience wholeheartedly agreed, giving Cohen a standing ovation while her youngest children enthusiastically high-fived their mother.



Pictured left to right:
Tracee E. Davis, NYSBA
President Claire P. Gutekunst,
Carla Miller, Lauren J.
Wachtler, Bernice K. Leber,
Carrie H. Cohen, USDJ Shira
A. Scheindlin (ret.), Miriam
J. Manber, Adrienne M. Hol-
lander, Anna S. Badalian,
Section Chair Mark A.
Berman, Alisha L. McCarthy,
Erica Barrow