

Joan M. Gross / Hahn Loeser & Parks

JACQUELINE MITCHELL | STAFF REPORTER

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Before the early 1970s, becoming a lawyer was not much of a viable career path for women, recalled Joan M. Gross, 64, an estate-planning attorney at Hahn Loeser & Parks in Cleveland.

“I can’t say I dreamt of it since I was a little girl, because little girls my age didn’t dream of being lawyers,” Gross said.

After receiving her bachelor’s degree in mathematics from Boston University’s School of Education in 1972, Gross decided to blaze a trail by attending Case Western University School of Law, from which she graduated in 1976.

Although she had to adjust to the demanding amount of reading law school required, Gross said the logic she learned in her math courses aided her, and continues to aid her, in the logically based practice of law. She landed her first job as an estate planning attorney at a small Cleveland firm called Ford, Whitney, Crump and Schulz.

“Things were very different,” Gross said of the field at that time. “It’s been a slow change over the years.”

Gross recounted a work party she attended early on in her career, held at a downtown club that did not permit women to walk through the front door.

“(At first) I said I wouldn’t go,” she said. “My boss took me by the arm and walked me through the front door.”

After four years at the firm, she spent three years at Cleveland firm Burke, Haber & Berick, after which she took five-and-a-half years off to raise her children. She returned to the firm, which had been renamed Berick, Pearlman and Mills, for about eight years. She also served as assistant trust counsel at Society Bank (now Key Bank) for a year.



Gross, a Shaker Heights resident and member of The Temple-Tifereth Israel in Beachwood, has spent the past 16 years as a partner at Hahn Loeser & Parks, which has one of the largest estate planning teams in Cleveland. There, she serves wealthy individuals and assists them with transferring their wealth in a tax-efficient manner that suits their needs.

Her formula for success is as follows: “Hard work, perseverance and a willingness to take the extra step.”

Gross focuses her practice on estate planning, wealth transfer and preservation. She said the most difficult aspect of her area of expertise is losing clients who have passed away.

“I’m in estate planning, so that means I see people from one end of life to another, and (it means) losing clients who I consider my friends,” she said.

She considers making a difference in her clients’ lives and becoming their trusted adviser her greatest professional achievements.

“That comes with time,” said Gross.

Name: Joan M. Gross

Age: 64

Residence: Shaker Heights

Synagogue: The Temple-Tifereth Israel in Beachwood

Why she became an attorney: “When I went to law school in 1973, I went for the intellectual challenge. My job is intellectually challenging, but what I really love about it is my relationship with my clients and how I can make a difference in their lives.”