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Forget glass ceilings, build new houses – Justice Ring

The Irish Women Lawyers' Association honoured High Court Judge Mary Ellen Ring for her many achievements at its annual gala dinner on 6



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October at Blackhall Place in Dublin. Ms Justice Ring is a former IWLA chair.

Named 'Woman of the Year' at the glamorous event for women in the profession, the award was presented by Ms Justice Catherine McGuinness.

An elegant attendance of 104 legal professionals enjoyed the evening in the Presidents' Hall at Blackhall Place, with the pre-dinner reception sponsored by Eversheds Sutherland.

The gala dinner also saw the launch of the IWLA's new vision statement, which, by 2021, aims to make the organisation the foremost, public-facing voice for women lawyers in Ireland.

"We would love to have more people involved," chair Maeve Delargy (Arthur Cox) told *Gazette.ie*.

She is looking forward to engaging with new members, as part of its mission to be an advocate both for women in law, and for changes to the law for women.

The evening's highlight was the presentation of the 'Woman of the Year' award by Justice Catherine McGuinness to Justice Mary Ellen Ring, who gave a humorous and insightful speech about her life and career.



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Justice Minister Charlie Flanagan tomorrow reveals his departmental budget plans for the year ahead



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Ms Justice Ring thanked the IWLA for the “humbling honour”, and complimented the committee on their unseen work.

“An honour such as this tends to signify advancing age,” she quipped, “but it’s a step up from a posthumous award.”

Ms Justice Ring was called to the Bar in 1985 and practised in criminal, administrative and child law. She was called to the Inner Bar in 2002. She became a judge of the Circuit Court in April 2012; and of the High Court in July 2015.

She was named chair of the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission in July 2015.

Ms Justice Ring recalled that she studied politics and philosophy as an undergraduate at UCD, where she had “had a ball”, having moved to Ireland after growing up in the US.

She read legal studies at the College of Commerce in Rathmines (now DIT), before enrolling at the King’s Inns.

The judge described how she had wanted to practice in criminal law, despite being warned that women didn’t succeed in that area.

Perry Mason



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JUDICIARY

Forget glass ceilings, build new houses, says Justice Mary Ellen Ring

The Irish Women Lawyers' Association honoured Justice Mary Ellen Ring at its gala dinner on Saturday



“I never thought I couldn’t do criminal law,” she said, recalling how she loved Perry Mason as a child.

“In any woman’s career, sometimes being in the right place at the right time is as important as ability,” she said, describing how doors had opened for her while devilling at the law library.

“Ultimately, you have to capitalise on the right place moment, but chance and luck do help,” she observed.

“When I arrived [at the law library] in 1985, I saw before me the likes of Mary Robinson, Mary Laffoy, Mary Finlay, Mary Irvine, Mary O’Toole, and I knew that luck, and my name, meant that the omens were good,” she joked.

Ms Justice Ring commented that women had only been peripherally involved in the construction of the rules of business, governance, the professions, and of life outside the home.

“What woman would design a work-life that wasn’t flexible to allow time out for caring for others, whether children, family or friends?” she asked.

“Perhaps we women spend too much time breaking a glass ceiling in an edifice we did not build,” she said.

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“Are we spending too much time trying to change the rules of a game we maybe don’t want to play?” she asked.

Balanced life

“Are women the only ones who want a flexible work-life, a more balanced life? I don’t think so,” she said.

Each path is important, and there is no right or wrong path, she added, but there must be a path in the first place – for both women and men.

“Deciding you are not going to juggle children and work is just as important as deciding you are,” she said.

“Not going for promotion now, because it doesn’t suit, is just as important as deciding you are going for promotion.

“Giving way to a partner’s career is as important as both going forward.

“And standing still can be really relaxing,” she said.

The important thing, ultimately, is to do your best and have a great time doing it, she concluded.

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Ms Justice Ring's finishing toast to "building new houses rather than breaking glass ceilings" received a standing ovation.

- See photographs from Saturday's event at <https://www.lawsociety.ie/gazette/image-galleries/iwla-gala-dinner-2018/>

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