

Chamber Chat with Judge Marks
-by Michelle Fagan

On October 25, 2006, Honorable Patricia D. Marks hosted a chamber chat for GRAWA members. Judge Marks, who originated the idea of GRAWA's chamber chats, began by describing her time spent as an Assistant District Attorney before she was first elected County Court Judge for Monroe County. Judge Marks also summarized her involvement as a co-chair for the New York State Committee on Criminal Jury Instructions which is responsible for creating jury instructions that jurors can more readily understand. Judge Marks also noted that www.nyscourts.gov/cji is a useful website with criminal jury instructions that are available to the general public.

Judge Marks also provided attendees with an overview of the Mental Health Court that she helped establish in Monroe County in 2003. The Mental Health Court, tries to address the issue of incarcerating individuals with serious mental health problems with the goal being to reduce these individuals' involvement in the criminal justice system by connecting them to ongoing mental health treatment programs. Individuals are referred to the program by district attorneys and judges. Individuals technically remain defendants, but also become Mental Health Court "clients." Participants in the program are encouraged to become engaged in the process which is especially important to individuals with mental illnesses because having someone, especially a judge, listen to them is very meaningful. The Mental Health Courts holds a Silver Ribbon Ceremony for those who successfully complete the program.