

THE DAILY RECORD

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MCBAPRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Looking to the year ahead for the MCBA

This is my inaugural column as president of the Monroe County Bar Association. I would like begin by taking stock of where we are, then talk about what is coming this year, and finally ask for your help in one area as we move forward.

This is an amazing bar association. We have done well because we care about our members, care about our clients and care about our community.

The review last year by the American Bar Association confirmed what we thought we knew — that our association is strong in membership, participation, programs, governance, continuing legal education and finances, and has both dedicated staff and volunteer leadership.

We learned that the average bar association of our size has just over 50 percent of attorneys in its area as members — we have almost 73 percent of the attorneys in our area as members.

- Our member benefits were found to be better than those of our peers;
- Our membership is increasing despite a difficult economic times;
- Our CLE efforts are extraordinary — our Academy of Law presented more programs in May than many bar associations our size present all year;
- Our finances our strong — so solid that we were able to hold the line on dues this year; and
- No bar association in the country anywhere near our size comes close to matching our level of community involvement.

But what really makes this association so special is the high level of active participation of you, our members. Of our over 2,000 members, about half are engaged in some activity supported by this association. You serve on our Board of Trustees, the Board of the Foundation, in our vibrant committees and sections, and you present at our 65 CLE events annually.

You volunteer your time at Lawyers for Learning, Teen Court, the mock trial program, and on the boards of our partners in Telesca Center for Justice.

The ABA team asked why our association engages in all this activity to make the community better. Someone said it is in our DNA. But that is too glib an answer.

Our commitment to the community — along with our members and our clients — is the result of decades of decisions by gener-

ations of leaders of this association to act in the public interest, not simply as a trade association. And this activity makes our association and the community stronger.

But even though we are the best bar association of our size in the nation there is more that we can do. Our very able President-elect Connie Walker led an implementation team to look at the areas where the ABA report suggested that we can improve. Her team has developed a three-year implementation plan for our improvement efforts that will be presented to the Board of Trustees.

We will continue to deepen our cooperation with our Foundation, the Greater Rochester Association for Women Attorneys and the Rochester Black Bar Association, and will reach out to the bar associations throughout the Seventh Judicial District to see how we can better cooperate with them.

We will continue to move forward to convince our community to adopt the excellent recommendations of the Public Defender Selection Task Force, which recommended a nonpolitical system for selection and retention of the Public Defender.

We will see what we can do to help close the civil legal services Justice Gap, identified by Chief Judge Lippman's Task Force, which Sheila Gaddis and Bruce Lawrence serve on, and we will continue our Judicial Evaluation Task Force work to see if we can improve on our process for evaluating candidates for judicial office.

One of the areas where our association will be trying to provide better services to our members will be to see what we can do to assist lawyers in transition.

When a number of our key committee and section chairs met with the ABA team, the issues faced by lawyers in transition emerged as both a need and an opportunity. The need and the opportunity were reinforced at the solo and small firm town hall meeting earlier this year. And we had an excellent panel on the subject with former Chief Judge Judith Kaye, herself a lawyer in involuntary transition, and several local attorneys who had recently changed practice settings.

In these meetings, we heard from and about young lawyers graduating from law schools, unable to find jobs in firms, who

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were hanging out their shingles as solo practitioners with no support or mentors. We heard from mid-career lawyers leaving government service or private firms and striking out on their own. We heard from senior lawyers whose firms are adopting retirement policies that force or encourage lawyers to leave firms well before the time they want to retire.

This year we will be looking at what we can do as an association to provide more support for solo and small firm lawyers and the many lawyers in our community that are looking at some form of transitioning of their practice, and how we can better serve them. And if they are not members, how can we encourage them to join.

We have hired an attorney, Natalie Pincus, on a part-time basis, to help us identify the needs that our association can reasonably meet and to help committee sections and the bar staff develop responses for all of these attorneys and to work on collaboration with the other bar associations in the judicial district.

This is not an area where we have the answers. It is an area where we need your help. If you have ideas on how we can better assist you or any of these lawyers, contact Pincus at npincus@mcba.org or call (585) 402-7183.

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