

THE DAILY RECORD

WESTERN NEW YORK'S SOURCE FOR LAW, REAL ESTATE, FINANCE AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE SINCE 1908

MCBA supports members and the community

Recent activities of the Monroe County Bar Association confirm the MCBA plays an important role for its members, the profession generally, and the larger community in which our members practice.

The MCBA is the catalyst that encourages its many talented members to collaborate in professional activities and community service, which benefit all whom the MCBA touches. The MCBA's reach spans professional education, support of members, evaluation of judges and judicial candidates, ensuring access to justice to those who cannot afford to pay for counsel, helping to improve the legal system, improving communication between lawyers and the public, and community service relating to law and the legal profession.

The MCBA is well-known for continuing legal education and presents more than 60 live CLE programs each year. The programs provide a high quality and economical way to educate lawyers on updates in the law, practical skills and numerous specialized areas of legal practice, as well as application of new information technology, computer support, better communication techniques, professional ethics and public policy issues, among many others. Such CLE programs also allow those with special competence and experience to demonstrate their knowledge and share it with others, saving attendees the expense and time required to travel elsewhere in the state or country for CLE programs.

The MCBA offers an impressive array of member services, some well-known and others deliberately quiet, which provide important help to those who need them. That includes assisting members with insurance of various kinds, including malpractice, health, disability, life, and long-term care, and support for members and the public on a range of professional topics, including ethics, practice management, professional responsibility, law practice succession, representation of hearing impaired clients and protecting the public from unlawful practice of law.

Quietly, and with dignity, the MCBA supports members who may have mental health, addiction or substance abuse problems, while helping to ensure their clients are protected and the affected members can return to their practices and their families and friends as soon as they are able.

The MCBA conducts an annual memorial service to poignantly commemorate the lives of members who died in the previous year.

The MCBA also is active in helping to improve our system of

justice, including consistent support for legal services for the underserved, through the Telesca Center for Justice and the MCBA's legal services partners: the Legal Aid Society of Rochester, Volunteer Legal Services Project of Monroe County Inc., Empire Justice Center, and Monroe County Legal Assistance, as well as the Foundation of the Monroe County Bar.

These organizations, each with their own mission, work together toward achieving the common goal of improving access to justice for those who otherwise cannot afford quality legal representation. The MCBA and its committees and sections also comment on legislation and improving the system of justice.

The MCBA is active in the evaluation of judges and judicial candidates, which includes the MCBA's judicial evaluation system for candidates for judicial office, as well as a periodic and confidential system for providing constructive feedback to sitting judges. In addition, the MCBA provides feedback to appointing authorities of judges and judicial-related personnel.

The MCBA plays a unique role in such evaluations. Members individually could not practically provide ratings on candidates or feedback for other judicial officers without the structure and anonymity of the MCBA's procedures. That structure allows the MCBA to gather, present and provide education, with valuable, insightful information to help the public, political parties and appointive authorities select judicial candidates with the best possible knowledge base, and to help both candidates and sitting judges improve and appreciate how they are seen by those who practice before them.

The MCBA's judicial rating system is unique in our region in that it combines a broad-based survey of lawyers with direct experience with the candidates with a carefully-appointed, diverse, experienced and conscientious committee that reviews the data — including surveys, references and writing samples — interviews the candidates and ultimately assigns the ratings.

The MCBA also assists in other areas related to improving the system of justice, including the proposed expansion of electronic case filing in Monroe County, commenting on new legislation and helping to educate the public and relevant authorities about the administration of justice and the independent representation of those who cannot afford counsel.

Public education is another important MCBA function. In the last year, that has included Speakers Forums presented by lead-

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ing regional and national figures, such as U.S. Rep. Louise Slaughter, former New York State Chief Judge Judith S. Kaye, The Associated Press President and CEO Thomas Curley, New York State Bar Association President Steve Younger and, this afternoon, New York State Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman, just to name a few.

Each has visited The Rubin Center for Education at the Telesca Center for Justice to provide informal remarks, answer questions and participate in discussion with MCBA members and the public about important issues affecting our members and community.

The MCBA has commented publicly on important issues relating to lawyers and the law, including this monthly column in *The Daily Record*, periodic articles and commentary in other newspapers, frequent articles and notices in MCBA publications in print and online, public addresses and through special press releases when circumstances warrant, such as calling out for the public misleading television advertising regarding a judicial candidate or urging better funding for civil legal services for the poor.

Another area of MCBA activity is purely community service, and includes mentoring students at School 29, a City of Rochester elementary school, and providing attorney advisors for Law Explorers, coaches and judges for High School Mock Trial and supporting Rochester Teen Court.

One of the most important and far-reaching service programs is the MCBA's Rochester Legal Diversity Clerkship Program,

which for six years has reached out to attract and support law students from historically under-represented groups to be legal interns with Rochester area law firms and other legal employers. The clerkship program promotes a more diverse and just legal system that better reflects the breadth of the society in which lawyers practice.

Funded in part by the Foundation of the Monroe County Bar, the program was expanded this year, with a re-commitment by the board of trustees and co-sponsorship by the Greater Rochester Association for Women Attorneys and the Rochester Black Bar Association.

The MCBA has done all of these things and more this year, despite experiencing a period of nearly unprecedented economic downturn nationally and in Monroe County that has affected lawyers, clients and funding sources alike. The MCBA has stretched to do more with less, relying on its committed members and leaders and dedicated professional staff.

Despite financial pressures, support for our programs and functions I've discussed here has never been in doubt. There never was a shortage of volunteers willing to take on the challenges or ideas on how best to accomplish the tasks at hand.

All of those affected by the work of the MCBA are enriched by these activities, and the leadership and members of the MCBA can be justly proud of what has been accomplished.

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