

Notes on My Hometown of Flint, Michigan



Donald G. Rockwell

I have an ongoing debate with SBM past president Larry Nolan about how I'm the luckiest guy I know. Larry disputes this assertion by maintaining that he's the luckiest. While some aspects of Larry's claim may have credibility, like surviving a heart attack (fortunately, I can't argue with him on that), one important point favors my side of the argument: Larry didn't grow up in the best town in the country to grow up in—I did.

I can't cite exactly when I realized how truly special Flint was. It certainly was well after I graduated from college and law school. It likely was when General Motors began closing factories in Flint and many workers became former workers. I started seeing the changes to the city that I had always taken for granted. Wasn't every town like mine when I was growing up? As I look back now, it reminds me how things—like Flint, for example—can appear so clear in retrospect.

During the heyday of General Motors, the city was flush with high-paying jobs and everyone drove new cars. If you worked for General Motors, you bought a new GM car every two or three years. Even during a time when American cars had little if any

rust protection, the majority of cars in Flint looked brand new. An old car in Flint was anything built more than five years ago.

Perhaps the true gemstones of Flint in the 1950s and 1960s were the public school system and schools of higher learning. Of course, I was just one of the thousands of students who were direct beneficiaries. I can still remember sitting in some of my elementary classes and being aware of several well-dressed, professional-looking people sitting in our small chairs at the back of the room. Our teacher would introduce these individuals as educators from various parts of the world. They were there to study how Flint teachers taught, because our teachers were among the world's very best—and best paid.

Years ago, one of my Flint Rotary colleagues asked me when and where I had graduated from high school. Once he learned I had graduated in Flint in the '60s, he told me he was a Flint School District board member during that time, and never once during his years as a member did the board decline to do something based on economic considerations.

"We never even discussed money," he said. "It was only whether we wanted to do it." Imagine any school board today

enjoying that kind of economic freedom for its students.

The '50s and '60s also allowed Flint to invest wisely in a cultural center that is home to the Flint Institute of Arts, the Longway Planetarium, the Whiting, the Flint Institute of Music, the Flint Youth Theater, the Applewood Estate, and the Sloan Museum. These renowned institutions continue to attract visitors and world-class artists and performers. A cultural center of this quality is typically found in cities many times larger than Flint. I took advantage of all of this growing up.

Over the years, Flint has become home to the best of colleges and universities. I am lucky to work for and represent Kettering University, a world-class and leading U.S. ranked engineering school whose graduates are among the movers and shakers of many industries, including Michigan's auto industry. I am an alumnus of the University of Michigan–Flint, where I had the benefit of *full* professors in a college of the University of Michigan throughout my four years. It was a private-school atmosphere with public-school tuition. Mott Community College ranks among the best community colleges in the country. These jewels continue to give future generations access to the best of higher learning.

The views expressed in the President's Page, as well as other expressions of opinions published in the *Bar Journal* from time to time, do not necessarily state or reflect the official position of the State Bar of Michigan, nor does their publication constitute an endorsement of the views expressed. They are the opinions of the authors and are intended not to end discussion, but to stimulate thought about significant issues affecting the legal profession, the making of laws, and the adjudication of disputes.

Flint is also home to another jewel: a close-knit and extremely active and competent bar. I'm not aware of a more active and involved local bar than the Genesee County Bar Association and Inns of Court.

Flint is also home to another jewel: a close-knit and extremely active and competent bar. I'm not aware of a more active and involved local bar than the Genesee County Bar Association and Inns of Court. These associations' activities routinely include mock trials for high school students, free legal advice to those who cannot afford lawyers, holiday dinners serving over a thousand neighborhood people annually, bar foundation donations and scholarships, golf outings, continuing legal education, and monthly luncheons and legal-learning dinner programs, just to name a few. As I have said so often, the huge advantage of my local bar is that it is large enough to do everything it wants to accomplish, yet small enough where everyone knows one another.

On September 28 at the Cobo Center in Detroit, I learned once again about the close-knit nature among my local bar brothers and sisters. More than 30 colleagues, including seven judges, joined my family and me at the SBM Inaugural Luncheon. It



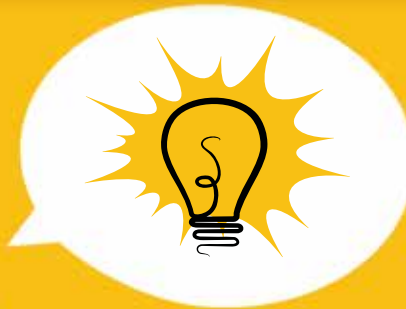
was a collective gathering that told me one basic thing: that we in Flint are in this together! I will never be able to express the depths of my emotions and gratitude to so many for being there that day.

In the October *Michigan Bar Journal*, you may have seen pictures of my immediate family. Above is a picture of many members

of my larger Flint/Genesee County bar family. As you can guess by now, being able to call these people my friends is just one more reason why I am the luckiest guy I know.

To my dear friends in Flint and Genesee County and to everyone in our State Bar, I wish you the best of holidays and a great and prosperous new year! ■

Open Call for Articles!



MICHIGAN Bar
Journal

The *Michigan Bar Journal* is currently seeking articles of broad focus and general interest to attorneys. All submissions are subject to the MBJ article review process and must conform to the guidelines at www.michbar.org/journal/about/artguidelines.pdf. Articles that are approved for publication will be published in future issues of the MBJ.

For questions, contact MBJ Editor Linda Novak at lnovak@michbar.org.