

# A Man for All Seasons

By Lynn Patrick Ingram

“To whom much is given, much is expected.” (Luke 12:48) These are words that new State Bar President Dennis (“Denny”) Barnes lives by. And it shows.

He is known by his friends as a man of strong faith, a dedicated husband and father, and a tireless servant to others.

“Denny lives his life in a perpetual state of gratitude,” said Michigan Court of Appeals Judge Michael J. Riordan. “As a result, he is always giving back, making himself a gift to others.”

This gift has, in turn, been a blessing to his family, friends, colleagues, clients, community, and everyone he serves.

“Denny sees the good in everyone and everything, and he always tries to bring it out,” said Beth Barnes, his wife of more than 30 years. “In addition, he will do anything for anyone, and he always does the right thing. He is true to his faith and himself.”

His friends and family say he will be a gift to the 45,000-plus members of the State Bar and the public.

“The SBM membership can rest well during Denny’s tenure,” said friend and law partner Sharon Woods, noting that while he is fully committed to “his family, church, community, law firm, and schools, he will also be fully committed to successfully leading the State Bar of Michigan. It will be a great year!”

## A life of gratitude

Barnes says the smartest decision he ever made was to ask Beth Keller to marry him. “And the luckiest thing that ever happened to me was when she said ‘yes.’”

“We’ve been married for three decades and are looking forward to the next three,” he said. “We’ve been blessed with two sons (Chris and Joe) and two daughters (Erin and Colleen) who bring far more joy than challenge to our lives.”

He also says the best investment he ever made was in his children’s education. His sons went to high school at his alma mater, Detroit Catholic Central; his daughters attended nearby Ladywood High School; and all four went to St. William Catholic School in Walled Lake.

And once again his gratitude turned to giving.

He currently serves on Catholic Central’s Board of Directors and Alumni Board and was on the Dads’ Club Board. He has also been the school’s unofficial photographer for more than a dozen years, shooting all the school’s big games and events for free and sharing his work with the CC community.

In addition to his work with Catholic Central, he has served

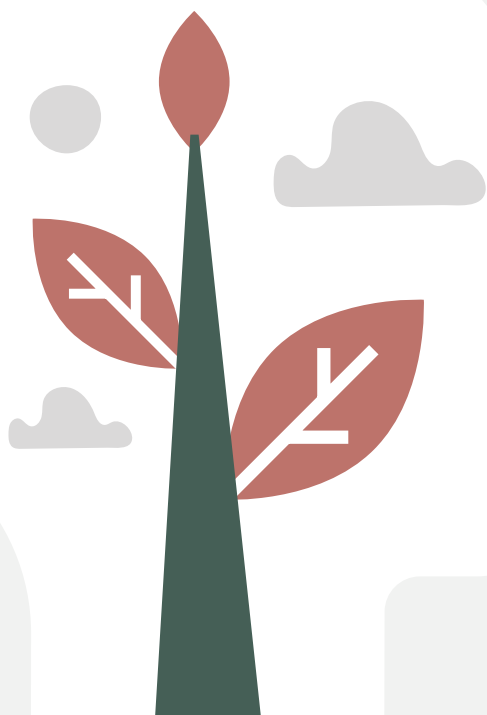


Beth and Denny

in numerous other bar and professional organizations and is a devout Notre Dame graduate and fan.

“One year on the eve of the Michigan–Notre Dame football game, Denny convinced the firm’s IT fellow to put the Notre Dame fight song as the ring tone on the phone of a very loyal Michigan grad who, fortunately, has a good sense of humor,” Woods recalled. “Of course, word spread of the pending prank, which had everyone in the firm joining sides. As I recall, we had to bring in lunch for the entire firm to get everyone back to work.”

Barnes is also a tireless volunteer, serving his church and community in many ways. Among his many volunteer endeavors is his role on the board of the Buttons Invitational, a two-day charity golf outing that just celebrated its 35th year of raising funds for a long list of worthwhile Detroit-area causes.





Left to right: Chris, Erin, Beth, Denny, Colleen, and Joe Barnes

In addition to being a Buttons board member, he is a past recipient of the group's Green Coat Award, "given to individuals who give time and effort to projects for the good of others." The award represents not only service to Buttons, but also "how the individual lives his life the other 363 days a year." Green Coat winners are "individuals who are always willing when called on to assist others and do this unselfishly. They enjoy life to its fullest and recognize the good in others."

Barnes says he is particularly proud of this award. "[W]hile recognition from a charity golf outing may seem trite in comparison to other activities, this recognition reflects those other activities," he said. "[It] comes from a group of individuals who have demonstrated a high degree of devotion to their families and communities, who have distinguished themselves in their various fields, and whose individual and collective values and character I have always admired and tried to emulate in my own life."

According to those who know him best, he is a worthy recipient.

"Denny is selfless," said longtime friend Steve Burns. "He is always looking for ways to promote his friends and colleagues. And all members of the Bar can expect him to tirelessly work for their betterment and the advancement of the organization."

Beth Barnes agreed.

"He loves to mentor," she said. "Whether it's at church, at CC, at his firm, or in the profession, he takes time for everyone. He helps people find their strengths and overcome any perceived weaknesses."

Barnes is also a big proponent of pro bono work. He says that while he's guided clients through many complex problems, won judgments, and successfully defended claims in matters where millions of dollars and significant legal issues were at stake, his biggest and most rewarding victories have come in his pro bono cases.

"I represented a local charity in a case where two firms had already advised that the client didn't have a chance," he recalled. "I hoped to get a favorable settlement, but the opponent would not compromise a bit, so we had to try the case—which we won. When the company in a 'bet-the-company' case is a charity, it is just that much more satisfying."

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—*State Bar President Dennis Barnes*

## Barnes Fast Facts

**Education:** Detroit Catholic Central High School (1979); Hillsdale College (1983); Notre Dame Law School (1986)

**Firm/Practice Areas:** Barris, Sott, Denn & Driker, PLLC (Detroit)/Commercial and business litigation and mediation, facilitation, and arbitration with an emphasis on intellectual property disputes, insurance law, professional liability claims, antitrust claims, and a variety of business torts

**Bar Association and Related Service:** State Bar of Michigan (current president); Federal Bar Association Eastern District of Michigan Chapter (past president); Detroit Metropolitan Bar Association Commercial Litigation Section (chair); Federal Court Standing Committee on Civility; Federal Court 2009 Magistrate Reappointment Selection Panel; Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society; Michigan State Bar Foundation; Oakland County Bar Association; Incorporated Society of Irish American Lawyers; Shamrock Bar Association

**Family:** Wife, Beth; sons, Chris and Joe; daughters, Erin and Colleen

On a smaller scale, he recently successfully represented a friend's mother who was "being churned up in a legal dispute that she didn't ask for and did not deserve." While he was not expecting anything, he was especially grateful for the thank-you note he received, which was signed, "Mom."



Left to right: Denny's father, Bob; Chris; Denny; and Joe

### A gift to the Bar

Barnes says he plans to continue and build on the State Bar's efforts as a leader in innovation and hopes to leave it in better shape than he found it.

"Ours is a learned profession dedicated to a spirit of public service. While the principles underlying our profession have not changed, the business of law has changed more in the last 10 years than it has in the last 100, and the pace of change is not slowing down," he said. "I would like to continue our work as a national innovator in moving the legal profession into the future, while preserving the best of our profession, so we can better serve our core mission of promoting the professionalism of lawyers; advocating for an open, fair, and accessible justice system; and providing services to members that enable them to best serve clients."

He says the State Bar is already evaluating ways to streamline its governance structure and scope to "improve efficiency and effectiveness, enhance member engagement, build trust with members and the public, and further the SBM's ability to fulfill its mission" and he hopes to lead that project to completion this year. "Our work is not done," he said, "but I hope the SBM will look and be more effective, efficient, and economical for our members."

Barnes also hopes to inspire attorneys by highlighting professionalism and civility and reminding them of their unique role as part of a noble learned profession.

"As noted in the preamble to the Michigan Rules of Professional Conduct, '[a] lawyer is a representative of clients, an officer

of the legal system and a public citizen having special responsibility for the quality of justice," he said.

Finally, he plans to encourage lawyers to get involved.

"The State Bar of Michigan and numerous bar associations across the state offer great opportunities for lawyers to serve the public by seeking improvement of the law, the administration of justice, and the quality of service rendered by the legal profession—all while developing great relationships," he said.

Meanwhile, Barnes's friends and family say State Bar members and constituents should be excited about his presidency.

Burns says State Bar members and the public "can expect a humble and hardworking leader with a strategic and focused vision that will continue to solidify the current foundation and build the Bar in the future," adding that the State Bar "is truly getting a man of Goodness, Discipline and Knowledge" (CC's motto).

And his wife says members can rest assured they're in good hands.

"Denny doesn't do anything halfway," Beth Barnes said. "He sees a need, and he works to make it better. His faith permeates everything he does, and he does it with great joy and gratitude."

Barnes has been given much, and much should be expected of him.

According to his wife and others, he welcomes those high expectations, because when push comes to shove, "Denny will never let you down." ■

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*Lynn Patrick Ingram, Esq., is publications development manager and legal editor at the State Bar of Michigan.*

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—Beth Barnes

