

Chelsea M. Rebeck, 2020–2021 Chair of the Representative Assembly

By Sara Elizabeth Allen

Colleague, friend, professional, partner, and confidant are some of nouns that best describe Chelsea Rebeck, a fierce advocate for those who find themselves going through the most difficult times in their lives and supporting them in what can only be assumed to be lost causes. It's a rare person who can step up to the plate and support without hesitation someone in their most vulnerable state. As her friend and partner, I've witnessed her support for those around her both personally and professionally.

Rebeck, the chair of the 2020–2021 State Bar of Michigan Representative Assembly, is a rare gem. She did not dream about becoming a lawyer. She did not come from a long line of attorneys and civil servants. She put herself through Western Michigan University Thomas M. Cooley Law School, graduating in 2012, and earned an LL.M in taxation and became a certified public accountant in 2014—all while raising two young children. Along the way, she was embraced by mentors and colleagues and has been able to thrive in her practice while being the anchor for the loves of her life, her children Brynn (9) and Devon (6).

"It was never easy," said Rebeck, managing partner of Rebeck & Allen in Southfield. "Having to build a future and trajectory with your own two hands is a challenge, but I consider myself extremely lucky and count my blessings daily."

Rebeck, 37, was an RA member for many years before serving as clerk and vice chair under Richard Cunningham and Aaron Burrell, respectively. She is seasoned and ready to assume the responsibilities of RA chair and serve the state's lawyers.

"Having the unique opportunity to work with public servants and leaders such as Aaron Burrell along with the guidance and mentorship of Rick Cunningham, I see myself as extremely lucky to have had the



Chelsea M. Rebeck

good fortune and privilege to learn the important role that the officers of the Representative Assembly play," Rebeck said. "I am confident that the skills and tools I gathered, together with my professional experience, have positioned me to succeed and best serve you in my upcoming tenure."

In the coming bar year, Rebeck (pronounced "REE-beck") will focus on three main items:

- Continue the transformational work of Aaron Burrell with the goal of spotlighting diversity within bar leadership and the Representative Assembly.
- Spearhead a new license fee structure to better align the budgetary requirements

that have been an integral part of her work with the SBM Board of Commissioners Finance Committee.

- Continue to further the reach of the Representative Assembly to ensure that SBM members are adequately and appropriately represented.

Rebeck fully anticipates that under her leadership, the Representative Assembly will provide the guidance needed to navigate the harsh economic times resulting from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and continuing social unrest.

"Leadership is accepting the responsibility for enabling others to achieve a shared vision and a shared purpose in the face of uncertainty," she said. "I cannot think of a time in our professional careers where this has been more important than now. I am committed to take the reins and support our Representative Assembly and members of the bar through this period."

In addition to her master of law in taxation and CPA accreditation, Rebeck is a certified fraud examiner. Her practice focuses on tax law, tax controversy, tax-related criminal and civil litigation, and advising businesses and individuals in a variety of areas related to taxes, finances, and business issues. In addition to her law practice, she is an adjunct professor at Walsh College and Schoolcraft College, teaching undergraduate and master's tax and accounting and business law.

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Photo by Emma Burcusel

Chelsea Rebeck is managing partner at Rebeck & Allen in Southfield, where she primarily focuses on tax controversy work.

Though she has primarily focused on tax controversy work at Rebeck & Allen, Rebeck pivoted her entire firm to focusing on assisting small businesses and non-profit organizations with obtaining emergency funding in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. She has greatly expanded her network of clients and organizations to ensure that they were able to sustain their operations. Thanks to her hard work and the dedication of her staff and partners, her firm has helped more than 500 organizations receive upwards of \$250 million in funds.

As the leader of the State Bar's final policymaking body, Rebeck recognizes the need to unite by implementing cohesive messaging and sharing a uniform vision.

"I have had the privilege of learning from some of the finest professionals in the industry," she said. "It is imperative that we leverage our relationships, professional colleagues, and power to meaningfully and pragmatically address the issues we cherish most. Our members are looking at us for leadership and clarity; it is incumbent upon us to provide it as they're navigating these uncharted territories."

Rebeck was first recruited to bar service by former SBM Finance Director Jim Horsch after a chance encounter at the 2015 Annual

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Rebeck is the mother of two children, Brynn (9) and Devon (6).

Meeting. Working with Horsch on the Audit and Finance committees motivated her to pursue other ways in which she could serve her profession. She joined the Representative Assembly due in part to encouragement from Dennis Barnes, who last month completed his term as State Bar president.

Her election to serve as Representative Assembly chair was a highly unusual occurrence. In the middle of a hotly contested election, Rebeck was nominated for clerk at the September 2018 RA meeting by 6th Circuit Magistrate James "Pat" Brennan, who saw her propensity for leadership and thought that she was right for the post. Despite two other candidates vying for the position, Rebeck won as a write-in, something many longtime bar leaders could not recall ever taking place.

Rebeck has been recognized as a Super Lawyers Rising Star annually since 2016 based on peer nominations and review of her legal experience and client results. Last year, she was honored with the Women in the Law award by *Michigan Lawyers Weekly*.

In addition to her dedication to the State Bar, Rebeck has been an advocate and leader

on behalf of other organizations. She is a member of the Audit and Finance committees for the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit, a recent appointee to the Charter Township of Commerce Planning Commission, and incoming vice chair of the Oakland County Bar Association Tax Committee.

"Volunteering and supporting public and not-for-profit organizations is at the core of who I am," she said. "It is directly correlated to the values I live by, pass down to my children, and run my firm in accordance to. In times of great personal and professional hardships, I have always got these organizations to remind me of true north and what is at the core."

Away from her professional life and service to other organizations, Rebeck is a single parent to two incredible children, with whom she plays multiple roles. As the quintessential cheer mom, she often takes charge of team craft events and travel plans. She ensures her children experience and appreciate what the world has to offer through travel and Jewish education. For good measure, she rides dirt bikes with her younger child, Devon.

Rebeck's values—helping others through advocacy while ensuring that the human element of the legal profession is always at the forefront—are at the center of her work. They'll be on display during her term as Representative Assembly chair. ■



Sara Elizabeth Allen is a partner at the firm of Rebeck & Allen in Southfield, where she practices family law. She and Chelsea Rebeck met as students at Western Michigan University Thomas M. Cooley Law School.