

Celebrating Changes and Constants



Rob Buchanan

I have been thinking a lot about change lately: change in our profession as we respond to the pandemic crisis; change in my role with the State Bar of Michigan as I take the helm as your president for the next year; even the changing seasons as the air cools and the leaves speckle red, yellow, and orange. In each of these situations, I'm struck not just by the changes, but by the constants.

With the pandemic bringing more change to the practice of law in the last seven months than we've seen in decades, it's easy to fixate on how everything is different. Yes, we now Zoom remotely into court hearings, depositions, and meetings and serve clients we might never meet in person, but the work we do hasn't changed. As always, Michigan attorneys are working tirelessly for their clients even though the ways we do so today look different from the day we first recited the Lawyer's Oath. Despite the change in methods, our guiding principles remain constant.

When I took office as president of the State Bar on September 17, 2020, I made clear I stand on the shoulders of Bar leadership and past presidents in continuing their great work. The person holding the title

has changed, but the role has not. As your president, I serve as the symbolic keeper of the lighthouse, helping energize the beacon that is the State Bar guiding safe passage through the hazards ahead. That vital structure was built long before my time and will continue standing tall long after I'm gone. The responsibility and reward during my watch is keeping the beacon bright for the good of the profession and our justice system and to protect the public. Despite a shift change, the role of the State Bar president remains constant.

And amid another beautiful Midwest fall, I'm reminded of how change is central to life for Michiganders. Giving it little thought, we've built our lives around continuous change. By embracing a new season every few months, we enjoy life here to the fullest—whether it is summer days playing on the beach or winter days skiing down a hill. We know how to adapt so changing seasons are celebrated, not dreaded. We know how to avoid sunburns and frozen pipes, and how to enjoy meaningful lives and deliver legal service to our clients no matter the weather. With changing seasons, we live a good life here in Michigan.

As attorneys and as Michiganders, we've already accomplished tremendous feats during the pandemic by embracing change. Our state, energized by the Michigan Supreme Court and State Court Administrative Office, is showing the world how to carry out justice safely by remote methods. We not only

adapted quickly to sudden changes forced by the pandemic, but we are also succeeding because of them.

Take court cases, for instance. After the shelter-in-place order started in March, motions and other court hearings soon resumed remotely and safely using Zoom technology. After that came remote mediations, case evaluations, and depositions. It seems remote depositions are now as common in civil cases as in-person depositions were before the pandemic, but they require no travel and save everyone considerable time and expense. Likewise, in contract work and in trust and estates, remote notarizations have sparked a boom in real estate sales, new transactions, and planning for the future.

As president of the State Bar, I will continue helping to shape the quick evolution of our profession while never losing sight of the constants making it a remarkable calling. I promise to help our leadership team and the Supreme Court spot troubles over the horizon and improve the experiences of Michigan's attorneys in calm waters so we're not just innovating when our backs are slammed against the wall.

When something is important, our profession needs to devise a smart plan and take action without delay. A century ago, for example, Michigan's own Henry Ford set out to make affordable cars when most people said, "What's wrong with a horse?" His innovation improved life and changed the world. ■

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