

# Cheerio, 2020!



Rob Buchanan

I don't remember ever looking forward to a new year as much as I welcome 2021. Good things are on the horizon—most notably widespread vaccinations against COVID-19. But before 2020 disappears from our rearview mirror, I want to highlight a few rewards and improvements we have all found in this dreadful chimney fire of a year.

Many things changed over the last year. Some changes were unimaginably horrible. Some, however, were actually improvements. Changes hit us in ways big and small, in our personal lives and our professional ones. Fortunately, we're headed in a direction where we can choose which changes to undo and which to keep.

In that spirit, here are a few things about 2020 that weren't awful and may be silver linings we actually want to keep:

- **Less unneeded travel.** No, I'm not talking about *fun* travel. Like everyone, I miss vacations, flying, and adventures with friends and family. But I don't miss some of the business travel. In the Before Time, I spent untold hours on the road and in the skies as a trial attorney traveling to expert depositions, court hearings, legal seminars, bar association meetings, and other demands of a plaintiff practice. Those hours added up, effectively

---

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.

---



Changes hit us in ways big and small, in our personal lives and our professional ones. Fortunately, we're headed in a direction where we can choose which changes to undo and which to keep.

swallowing weeks of time every year just traveling to or from somewhere. Isn't it nice so many things that used to demand a lengthy drive or flight are now done remotely? I hope we continue modernizing as a profession by keeping the remote option, so we choose when hitting the road is best—and rescue our valued time for better things than driving across the state, waiting in airports, or hunting a cellular signal to summon an Uber.

- **More face time.** Or should I say FaceTime? If you'd told me a year ago something called "social distancing" would bring us closer to clients, other attorneys, judges, and our families and friends, I would have worried about you and made a referral to SBM's Lawyers & Judges Assistance Program for a confidential evaluation. But here we are. Zoom calls have replaced meetings, yes, but they've also replaced dull conference calls. Disembodied, interrupting voices over a speakerphone now have new life as people with faces we scan for emotions and telling microexpressions. Even the backdrops help us better understand people and what they value. For instance, during

a motion hearing on Zoom, the camera provides a close-up of the judge's face, so we know if it is wise to secure the point or best to move on. Sure, I miss meeting folks in person, but for the many I used to talk to only by telephone, I see the change as a huge advancement. And on top of that, I am reconnecting with people that in a normal year I had no face-to-face conversations with. Technology, not proximity, is making these dynamic and more meaningful interactions possible, and that's wonderful. If you haven't already, seize the opportunity during social distancing to revitalize your old friendships and embrace geographically distant relatives in virtual face-to-face conversations. If you're like me, you'll wonder why it took a pandemic to do so.

- **Meetings that could be emails are now emails.** What more need I say?
- **Creating comfortable workspaces.** With clipped wings, less movement, and operating from one post, we have realized how our work environment could be better. Case files are now 100 percent digital and we are creating more

comfortable workspaces where we are happy spending all that extra time.

- **Finding resilience.** Whether running a law practice from a kitchen table or ordering office supplies with a cell phone, it's amazing how quickly we brainstorm, improvise, and adapt when doors get locked. We troubleshooted, collaborated, and reanimated systems in ways never imagined before 2020. We didn't give up. For instance, inspiring leadership by Chief Justice Bridget McCormack of the Michigan Supreme Court and Chief Judge Robert Jonker of the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Michigan got the trains moving again. I hope our courts and profession continue advancing, innovating, and improving.
- **Conversations about inclusivity.** Horrifying events in 2020 woke us up. We are finally having tough but important conversations about our nation's shameful problem of race and inequity.
- **Improving ourselves.** Though we felt isolated and frustrated because of social distancing, many have used the time productively. With fewer distractions and time to reflect, attorneys are using some of the extra time listening to educational podcasts, Zooming into free legal-skills webinars, participating remotely in bar association meetings, exercising, and finding other ways to improve.

Yes, 2020 was, by almost any measure, an awful year. However, I hope after you take a closer look at it that you, too, will find several rewards and lasting improvements. Here's to a safer, rollicking, and more rewarding 2021! ■



community service

access to justice

pro bono

