

Michigan Lawyers Auxiliary: 1956–2011

By Joyce Laing

This year marks the 55th anniversary of the Michigan Lawyers Auxiliary (MLA), a special-purpose organization affiliated with the State Bar of Michigan. The organization was created by a small group of lawyers' wives during the 1956 State Bar Annual Meeting with the intent of fostering entertainment for the spouses of lawyers attending the meeting. The Lawyers' Wives of Michigan group was approved by the SBM Board of Commissioners at the Annual Meeting the following year. From this evolved the community-oriented MLA that exists today.

While membership is relatively small in comparison to the number of married lawyers, the members are dedicated. Every effort has been made to welcome new members, including presenting an honorary membership to the spouse of the State Bar president.

The MLA was incorporated as a non-profit 501(C)(3) corporation in 1987. Bylaws adopted at that time state the organization's purposes as promoting better relationships and understanding between the profession and the public, cooperating with local and state bar associations, promoting local bar auxiliaries, and promoting fellowship among members and families of the legal profession. Today, the objectives state: "The purposes of the Corporation are educational and charitable; to create a better citizen awareness of the law; to serve the organized Bar Associations of the State of Michigan, and to support and assist local lawyers' spouses' organizations." While the emphasis is educational, the local auxiliaries maintain their sense of fellowship.

The MLA has historically promoted an extensive Law Day program, including a state-wide essay contest introduced in 1972–1973 for grades 7–9 that encourages students and teachers to examine the place of law in their

lives based on a theme chosen by the American Bar Association. The MLA earned the American Lawyers Auxiliary Law Day Achievement Award in 1974 and its Law Day First Prize in 1975. The Michigan Supreme Court has also recognized the MLA's Law Day program. Although the essay contest is no longer under the MLA's jurisdiction, efforts to promote law-related education programs continue. Current projects include Liberty Day, which promotes the "Constitution in Every Fifth-Grader's Pocket" program, and lesson plans for teachers to engage students' interest in the Constitution.

The MLA has also been recognized for publications such as "You and the Law," which in the past has been distributed to students ages 18 and under. In addition, the MLA annually presents the Crystal Apple Award to a Michigan teacher who has made a significant contribution to law-related education. Many Crystal Apple winners have gone on to be recognized as American Lawyers Auxiliary Teacher of the Year.

The State Bar of Michigan has recognized three MLA members—Marian Impastato, Mary Ann Farris, and Audrey Gray—with its Liberty Bell Award. The Liberty Bell Award is presented annually to nonlawyers who have dedicated themselves to strengthening the "effectiveness of the American sys-

tem of freedom under law, in keeping with the spirit of our Constitution."

The MLA is a charter member of the American Lawyers Auxiliary, an affiliate of the American Bar Association. Five Michigan women have served as ALA president.

Currently, there are active local auxiliaries in Grand Rapids and in Ingham, Kalamazoo, and Saginaw counties that promote the MLA's objectives. These auxiliaries have representatives on the MLA board. There are also individuals throughout the state who actively support the MLA and participate in board meetings. The MLA continues to promote the founding and growth of local lawyers' auxiliaries throughout the state.

The Grand Rapids Lawyers Auxiliary has supported programs at Kent County's juvenile detention center, which included "The Late Show," a nighttime reading program.

The main focus of the Ingham County Lawyers Auxiliary (ICLA), founded in 1936, is the Child Benefit Fund. Organized by volunteers from the circuit court's family division, the fund's goal is to enrich the lives of children involved in the court system. The ICLA also donates money and gifts during the holidays. Most recently, there has been a move to promote law-related education activities jointly with the Ingham County Bar Association's Young Lawyers Section.

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The Kalamazoo Lawyers Auxiliary (KLA) coordinates “The Late Show” at its local juvenile home, with community citizens as readers. It also provides an ice cream social and holiday party at the home. The KLA partners with the Kalamazoo Bar Association (KBA) to host receptions for new lawyers’ admission ceremonies and memorial services for deceased attorneys, and uses funds received from the KBA for projects such as purchasing new books for the juvenile home’s library. The KLA and KBA also work together on the “Constitution in Every Fifth-Grader’s Pocket” effort, which has provided more than 1,000 pocket Constitutions for Kalamazoo-area students.

The Saginaw County Lawyers Auxiliary (SCLA), established in 1955, is the largest local auxiliary in the state. The SCLA conducts courthouse tours for students in grades 5–12, presents a \$500 scholarship to college students studying law-related curricula, and hosts several social events each year. Its members participate in Law Day activities, high-school mock trials and billboard contests, the “Constitution in Every Fifth-Grader’s Pocket” program, lawyer-mentored law-related education projects for middle schools, and elementary-school poster and coloring contests. The SCLA and the Saginaw County Bar Association have joint activities including talent night, a holiday party, and a couples event. The SCLA’s main fundraiser is a wreath and poinsettia sale that raises approximately \$3,000 annually, with proceeds presented to law-related organizations in the community. The SCLA is also setting up a fund at the Saginaw Community Foundation for an endowed scholarship.

For information on joining the MLA, establishing a local auxiliary, or working on MLA projects, contact MLA State Bar liaison Marge Bosenberry at (800) 968-1442, ext. 6327. ■

Joyce Laing, a Michigan Lawyers Auxiliary board member who values women’s history, has responsibility for the MLA’s historical papers and has arranged to have them stored at the Michigan Historical Museum for preservation. She would like to thank the following for their editorial assistance: MLA President Alice Gordon and past MLA presidents Susan Patterson, Judy Weldy, Jeanne Skilton, and Mary Ann Farris.