

A Look Back... and Forward

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It is absolutely fitting that I pen my last *Bar Journal* article for publication in an issue devoted to professionalism. I came to the position as your executive director nearly six years ago with over 20 years' experience in legal ethics and professionalism—credentials that have shaped my approach to the wonderful opportunity I have been afforded to serve Michigan's lawyers, the judiciary, and the public.

My wife, Barb, and I are thrilled to share the news that we will shortly return to my home state of Florida so that I can concentrate wholly on the passion of my career—lawyer ethics and professionalism—as director of the Legal Division of the Florida Bar. My responsibilities in that position will be twofold: administering the Bar's multi-office lawyer regulation division and supervising the Bar's Center of Professionalism. As supervisor of the Center, I am especially proud to serve the Florida Bar and the Supreme Court's Professionalism Commission in seeking out innovative ways to address professionalism issues at Florida's law schools.

In addition to working both within Florida and nationally on professionalism initiatives, I will begin my work by introducing Florida's law schools to the findings and recommendations made by the ABA Professionalism Committee in a recently-completed survey of the nation's law schools, with the hope of innovating how professionalism is taught and modeled. As immediate past chair

of the committee, I am hopeful that implementation of those recommendations will raise new lawyers' understanding of and commitment to the ethical practice of law.

As I begin preparations for the transition, I reflect on all that has been accomplished during the past five and a half years through the hard work and perseverance of dedicated staff and committed volunteers, with the unwavering support of the lawyers of Michigan. It has been a tremendous privilege to participate in bringing about these positive changes.

At the outset of my tenure, the Bar was operating a substantial deficit budget that was in jeopardy of greatly increasing as a result of unplanned overspending on a major renovation of the Bar's headquarters in Lansing. I arrived to find staff morale at a low ebb, relationships between the Bar and certain segments of its members troubled, and the rapport between the Bar and the judiciary in need of major improvement. It is not hyperbole to state that the Bar's very continued existence was at risk at that time.

Shortly after I began work, I recall being asked by a member, "Do you know what you're getting yourself into?" My answer was unequivocal and affirmative. I had and retain a genuine excitement about the possibilities for this great organization. Fortunately for the members, I found the Bar leadership to be a great group of leaders willing to make tough decisions and capable of putting in the hard work necessary to turn things around and move forward organizationally. Without question, both leadership and membership sought dramatic change as a necessary

requisite to re-establishing the Bar's credibility and relevance.

To galvanize the talents of the existing staff and grow a fruitful partnership with Bar leadership, committees, and sections, we focused first on revitalizing the structure of the organization. A myriad of direct-report relationships to the executive director was discarded in favor of a division system, where department heads report to division directors, who form a senior management team that reports to the executive director. We hired new expertise from both the legal community and the private sector to ensure strong fiscal management and skilled administration of existing programs.

We made a commitment to increasing the quantity and quality of the Bar's communication with sections and Bar-related entities. Special attention was paid to revitalizing communication with the judiciary, the legislature, the Attorney Discipline Board, the Attorney Grievance Commission, the Institute for Continuing Legal Education, and the Bar Foundation, to name a few. As a part of that effort, we revamped our capacity to effectively interact with lawmakers by enlisting new lobbying expertise and hiring staff with both knowledge and experience in navigating through the legislative process.

To enhance the effectiveness of coordination between the staff and Bar leadership, the Bar's standing committees and the liaison relationships with staff were reviewed, streamlined, and revamped.

With these changes in place, we focused on learning what our members wanted from

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their Bar and how to get there. This process began with a combination of surveys and focus groups as a predicate to a Board retreat intended to produce a strategic plan. What we learned from our members was that the Bar should focus more on providing service to its members as a whole and less on either individual agendas or divisive issues. Members wanted to be educated about changes taking place in the profession and how to address them, such as how the delivery of legal

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services in nontraditional ways outside of the conventional legal community is impacting the legal marketplace.

The Board of Commissioners and the Representative Assembly adopted a strategic plan that crystallized a map for the Bar's future, articulating goals both internal and external in the areas of programs and services, public policy, image and identity, human resources, fiscal, and structure and governance. The plan has been reviewed and refined annually, as has an implementation plan that springboards from the strategic plan. The Board plans a February 2007 retreat to examine and enhance the strategic plan.

The Bar's financial house was put in order, replacing deficits with surpluses over the past several years. In 2005, the Bar retired the debt created by the major remodeling that was in its final stages five years earlier. Many changes contributed to this achievement: appointing lawyer-CPAs to the Bar's finance committee, making programmatic cuts, requiring strong financial stewardship at all levels, and institutionalizing transparent and comprehensible reporting.

Once the Bar's fiscal health was assured, we could focus on establishing programs and services in line with what our members sought—especially, help at their desks. In 2006, those programs include the Practice Management Resource Center, the Public

Policy Resource Center, a greatly-enhanced *e-Journal*, e-Commerce, an outreach program designed to enhance relationships between the Bar and its affiliated entities, a cohesive and energized Justice Initiatives Division, and an expanded Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program. The Annual Meeting—in the past controversial for its substantial cost relative to member participation—has been scaled back in cost but enhanced in content. The 2007 Annual Meeting agenda will include ICLE's ever-popular solo and small firm program, which provides pragmatic lessons for lawyers from any setting.

I am tremendously grateful for the trust that has been placed in me as your executive director during my time here. I am exceedingly proud of all that has been accomplished by everyone involved. It has been arduous at times, inspiring and rewarding at other times. I have made many friends. I have worked with a truly exceptional staff and first-rate

board members. I thank the countless members who have rolled up their sleeves and pitched in, serving as Representative Assembly members, as committee members, on special task forces, and in ad hoc capacities to improve all that we hold dear in the legal profession. I am appreciative of the members of the Supreme Court for supporting our efforts to make this Bar meaningful and relevant to its members and the public it serves.

Finally, I wish to thank my wife, Barb, for being with me everywhere my career has taken me, and God for unconditional forgiveness and love. I am so very proud to be a member of the legal profession. Our unique role in society is essential to the protection of our democracy. We must discern and cling to what unites us in order to effectively uphold the rule of law that is so central to our way of life.

Take care of each other. I know great things are ahead for the State Bar of Michigan. ♦