

# Professionalism and Civility in the Upper Peninsula

I always thought it would take an awful lot of courage to attend a swimming party hosted by a local bar association. That, or an unimaginably supportive environment created by long-standing respect and friendships—and the capacity of the group to welcome a stranger—would be necessary to make the event a success.

Once a year, the Alger-Luce-Schoolcraft (ALS) Bar Association takes time to gather in an outdoor setting so that members can enjoy their camaraderie and share the challenges of practicing law in the Upper Peninsula. A full day of golf, water, grilled fish, plenty to drink, lots of laughs, and swimming in Lake Superior go a long way to building civility and reinforcing professionalism in this special bar.

This year, ALS members ferried across Lake Superior and gathered on Michigan's spectacular Grand Island for a hot July respite, a celebration of membership, and a brief but important annual meeting and presidential election. The island outing followed an annual golf competition in which the Alger lawyers reclaimed their title as champions, allowing for good-natured teasing the rest of the day. Friendly conversations were interspersed with more serious (yet brief) reflections on contested judicial elections, the

dilemma of the county with just one criminal defense attorney on its indigent assignment roster, and the value of Internet professional trainings. They graciously allowed a State Bar staff attorney to join this year's meeting.

Chuck Nebel and son Charlie served as hosts, providing the venue and the essential meeting solutions. Charlie and Judge Bill Carmody supplied water transportation, making several flights across the channel to pick up stragglers and latecomers, like the ven-

***Longstanding respect, strong friendships, true civility—and the capacity of the group to welcome a stranger—carried the day.***

erable Judge Charles Stark, whose schedule changed unexpectedly and allowed his last-minute attendance. Prosecutor Karen Bahrman arrived by self-propelled kayak after her docket was cleared.

Special excursions to view the restored lighthouse, the secret swimming hole, and the remarkable shipwreck were included. Good Judge Bill Carmody served as grill

master, standing over the hot coals and preparing countless servings of whitefish accompanied by vinegar-flavored chips and a buttered French roll. Corn on the cob and brats rounded out the menu choices. John Wood's role as official liaison to the State Bar "inspector" was much appreciated.

Throughout the year, UP judges ride circuits, pairing up and traveling miles to cover a Friday docket. Criminal defense lawyers travel the roads to their distant indigent assignment that pays \$40 an hour. Until the advent of the Internet, a good training meant two days out of a practice to allow for travel downstate. Not unlike the practice of law everywhere, advocates in the north aggressively represent their clients and battle positions in a range of venues. Drunk driving defense, property line disputes, family law contests, and social security disability claims are vigorously pursued in the adversarial system. The challenges of successful lawyering in the Upper Peninsula leave little time for organized bar activities, but the one and only bar event for ALS members looked like more than enough to nurture the professionalism of this group.

Despite their repeated claims that no business is ever allowed at the annual meeting, two extremely important action items were handled by the ALS membership: Ken McConnell was declared president by acclamation, and next year's meeting date was set for July 27. Final note: No courage was necessary for this swimming event. Longstanding respect, strong friendships, true civility—and the capacity of the group to welcome a stranger—carried the day. ♦

*Candace Crowley is the development and external affairs manager at the State Bar of Michigan, a new position designed to increase communications with local and special-purpose bar associations. She has worked with the State Bar on justice initiatives issues since 1999 and was previously a legal services lawyer in southeast Michigan.*