

Robert C. Gardella, 2007–2008 Chair of the Representative Assembly

By Janet R. Gardella

The new chair of the Representative Assembly, the final policy-making body of the State Bar of Michigan, is ready for the job. He is also a family man and a great guy—but I could get carried away here because he is my husband. Bob and I will be celebrating our 11th wedding anniversary this October. It is my honor to share with you Bob's accomplishments and talents that will make him a great Assembly chairperson.

He has worked tirelessly for many years to keep the Assembly a vibrant organization. He absolutely loves the thoughtful analysis and intelligent opinions presented by the Assembly membership at every meeting. And he values the work that goes into the preparation by the Assembly members and State Bar staff for the presentation of proposals. He sees the Assembly as the voice of the everyday legal practitioner dedicated to improving our justice system.

I know firsthand about the long hours that he has spent on the phone and in person recruiting great lawyers from all types of positions and practices to run for election to Assembly seats and to fill vacancies as they arise. He believes that the Assembly is a treasured jewel of our Michigan legal system because it is comprised of attorneys from a variety of practice areas and backgrounds who provide an accurate reading of the pulse of the profession. He believes that the Assembly not only serves the lawyers of Michigan with bar policy, but also serves the Michigan Supreme Court, the Michigan legislature, and the executive branch by providing meaningful recommendations regarding the functioning of our justice system.

Bob comes from a community-minded family that has been active in government service. James D. Burns, a relative of Bob's mother, was a former sheriff of Wayne County



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and the first owner of the Detroit Tigers baseball team. Another relative, James A. Burns, was a former state senator from Detroit. Bob's cousin, Larry Doyle, is the executive director of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners, in addition to being the former city attorney for Royal Oak and a former Farmington Hills police officer. Another cousin, Bob Daley, is an assistant U.S. attorney in South Carolina.

Bob's hard work as editor of his high school newspaper and literary arts magazine sparked an interest in journalism. He graduated in 1984 from Washington D.C.'s National Journalism Center, and worked for nationally syndicated columnist Donald Lambro while attending school in Washing-

ton, D.C. He followed that with a degree in journalism from Michigan State University in 1986. The journalism skills that he received at NJC and MSU are many of the same skills that are necessary to be a good lawyer.

Bob and I, along with our children, have made Brighton our home. It is the community in which Bob was raised. Even though Bob and I both attended Michigan State University at the same time, we didn't meet each other until after Bob graduated from law school.

Bob was a candidate in Livingston County for the Michigan House of Representatives in 1986 when he was just 21 years old. The election was an adventure, and he lost by 99 votes out of 10,000 votes cast in the election. He jokes that he was lucky to survive the election because of the many unfriendly dogs ("with big teeth and loud growls") that he encountered going door to door while campaigning.

He formerly worked as a speech and account writer for Anthony M. Franco, Inc., a public relations company in Detroit, and as a legislative aide in the Michigan Senate. His enthusiasm for the state government system and strong desire to help others motivated him to attend law school. He enrolled in Thomas M. Cooley Law School in Lansing because he admired the school's founder, former Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Thomas Brennan, and the school had a great evening program, with top-notch professors. Bob worked during the day and

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Janet and Bob Gardella with their children, Katie and Bobby.

attended law school at night. He graduated in 1992 from Thomas M. Cooley Law School with a juris doctor degree.

The role of a lawyer, Bob believes, is one of the most important occupations in our society. The special training of a lawyer and the ethical standards required as a licensed professional are the reasons that the general public is put at risk when unlicensed persons attempt to substitute themselves for lawyers. Bob believes that our system of government must take stronger action to protect the role of the lawyer as a legal educator, planner, and problem solver. Title insurance companies, banks, mortgage companies, accountants, and many others have made attempts to practice law without a license in recent years by performing legal services and charging their customers for those legal services. The preparation of wills, trusts, real property conveyance documents, contracts, and other legal documents is more than “just filling in the blanks.” The planning and preparation of those documents can have long-range effects for the public if not done properly.

Bob is a former law clerk to 44th Circuit Court Judge Daniel Burress (now retired). His first lawyering job was as an associate attorney for a Brighton-based law firm, now called Burchfield, Park & Pollesch, P.C. He also served in the past as outside litigation attorney for the State Bar of Michigan Client Protection Fund.

Bob has a busy law practice in downtown Brighton, and practices in an office

with Patrick McDonald, a former nine-year member of the State Bar Board of Commissioners and labor arbitrator. Pat McDonald is a permanent deacon at our church in Brighton, and was the minister who officiated at our wedding ceremony. Bob’s practice focuses on family law, civil litigation, criminal defense, commercial law, and trans-

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portation law. He gets satisfaction in helping others find a practical solution to their problems, and is proud to be a part of the legal system.

His practice takes him all over, but mainly to the courts in Ingham, Livingston, Oakland, Genesee, Wayne, and Washtenaw counties. He is the legal counsel and registered lobbyist for the Great Lakes Limousine Association, comprised of licensed limousine operators, licensed bus operators, limousine manufacturers, and coach manufacturers. He is also the legal counsel for numerous trucking companies and limousine companies.

Bob was elected to the Assembly in 1999 and has served on the Assembly Review Committee and the Nominating and Awards Committee, and served as chair of the Nominating and Awards Committee. Bob was president of the Livingston County Bar Association during 1998–1999 and is currently a member of the State Bar Family Law, Consumer Law, Criminal Law, and General Practice sections.

Bob has taken an active role in various bar committees. Former SBM President Thomas Cranmer appointed Bob to serve on the Unauthorized Practice of Law Committee, and he has been appointed by SBM President Ron Keefe to sit on the State Bar Annual Meeting Committee and the Standing Committee for Law School Deans. During his service on the Board of Commissioners since 2005, he has served on the Executive Committee, Finance Committee, and Public Policy, Image and Identity Committee, and has been a liaison to the Environmental Law Section; Antitrust, Franchising and Trade Regulation Section; Client Protection Fund; and Public Outreach Committee. The Michigan Bar Foundation selected Bob as a Fellow in 2006.

He is an energetic volunteer and not just a spectator. He recognizes that volunteer work for the State Bar is essential to (1) promoting the benefits of legal services in society, (2) protecting the legal interests of the general public, and (3) helping lawyers share information.

When Bob is home, he likes to spend time with his close and extended family. A natural athlete, he enjoys playing a variety of sports and teaching our children to play baseball, football, golf, and other sports. Bob also loves motor sports, especially open wheel racing. He acquired that interest as a child, when he watched his Uncle Jack Gardella race Formula Fords. He looks forward to attending Indy Car races, both in and out of state.

Bob’s laughter, quick wit, and warm friendliness are his best qualities. The “lawyer jokes” don’t bother Bob, as he frequently has a light story or joke of his own to share. As a case in point, Bob and I were riding on a Waverunner in the Gulf of Mexico during our honeymoon in Florida, when a large group of “fins” appeared on the water

surface alongside our watercraft. I immediately thought they were sharks and voiced my concern. Bob laughed and jokingly said, "Don't worry! If they are sharks, sharks give lawyers professional courtesy and we won't be eaten." In fact, the "fins" belonged to dolphins looking for entertainment.

Bob's positive, upbeat look on life, good organization skills, and his efforts to keep the Assembly filled with energetic people will benefit the State Bar of Michigan. ■

Janet R. Gardella, wife of Assembly Chair Bob Gardella, is a graduate of Michigan State University and worked in the advertising industry in the Detroit area for 16 years as a print producer and buyer. She is the proud mother of two busy children, Katie, age 8, and Bobby, age 6. Janet assists her husband in numerous roles in the operation of his law practice in Brighton.



Bob Gardella (far left) with Cadillac Professional Vehicle executives Rob Rizzo, Sherri Pender, Dorothy Maul, and Joe Pennington at the 2007 Limofest tradeshow in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan.