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Living Up to the Legacy of Roberts P. Hudson

I am honored to be the third president from the Upper Peninsula in the history of the State Bar of Michigan. To be in that company is humbling, because the first—the very first Bar president and the first from the U.P.—was the great Roberts P. Hudson from Sault Sainte Marie. Hudson was followed in 1959 by another excellent lawyer, Burney Veum, also from the Soo, whose legacy is carried on today by the law practice of his son, Thomas J. Veum, and grandson, Michael T. Veum.

It was Roberts P. Hudson who gave us a core belief of this organization, one so dear to this Bar it is inscribed on our headquarters in Lansing: “No organization of lawyers can long survive which has not for its primary object the protection of the public.” The sentence comes from Hudson’s first article as president in 1935 for what was then the *Michigan State Bar Journal*. I reread that article, and was struck by how much is lost from Hudson’s phrase taken out of context. Take a moment to read what comes next:

Laws are not made for the benefit of the few. They should be those rules of conduct prescribed by the people themselves, through their properly constituted representatives, for the equal protection of the rights of society in the aggregate. They should apply with equal force to the rich and poor alike, and to the protection of those rights the legal profession must apply itself with integrity, industry and faith.

Your organization is designed not only for the benefit and betterment of its members, but primarily for the public at large who require the services of the profession.... It cannot represent the interests of any group or political faith. It must not draw distinctions of color, race or creed.

This message is remarkable for 1935. At the time, our country was still in the throes of the Great Depression, divided by the wide gap between rich and poor. Ra-

cial segregation remained prevalent in the South, while in Michigan, race-based restrictive covenants were still upheld in our state courts. Over the decades, we have worked as a state, and as a State Bar, to come closer to reaching the ideals pronounced by Hudson of equal protection for everyone under the law. Yet there is more we can do.

This year, I want to challenge the “senior” members of our State Bar, myself included, to see where we can apply our experience to make our profession better serve the people of Michigan. Whether it’s with a well-written amicus brief on behalf of a section of the State Bar, or by offering pro bono service to a low-income couple evicted from their home, senior and retired lawyers have a lot to offer. I see this sector of our Bar as an untapped resource. Those of us planning for retirement need to take a look at our plans and rethink the meaning of “retirement.” Retiring from a job as a lawyer need not be retirement from the profession. After all, there’s only so much golf you can play.

Noted attorney and author Scott Turow recently remarked, “I don’t know many young lawyers who leave law school without dreams of becoming pro bono princes and princesses; nor is there a dream of youth that seems to die faster.”¹ I think many of us would agree. But senior lawyers are now in a position to rediscover the drive to public service that motivated them to go to law school in the first place. Retirement affords senior lawyers the time and (hopefully) financial security to make pro bono work possible. Anybody can sit on a board or spearhead a community fundraiser; only lawyers have the unique ability to provide legal services.

Patrick McGraw, a senior lawyer from Cleveland, is a good example of what’s possible. A profile of McGraw was featured in the April 2007 edition of the *ABA Journal*.² McGraw retired in 2003 from a paid career as a securities lawyer, and later an attorney for the Ohio Civil Rights Commission. Now

at age 64, he spends 5 to 20 hours a week providing free legal assistance to homeless women with legal problems. In the article, he describes his frank surprise at the emotional reward associated with the work: “I was amazed to discover how satisfying it can be to work with people who are not used to having anyone pay attention to their needs. They are so grateful, and they express that.” He goes on to discuss some ways he structures his practice to keep some boundaries between his personal time and client time, which is especially important in retirement—after all, most senior lawyers in service want to preserve time to be “retired,” too.

During the course of the year, I want to hear from senior lawyers in Michigan who, like Patrick McGraw, are pursuing ways to serve the public in retirement or on a reduced-hours schedule. I am interested in your successes, but also your challenges, so the Bar can learn how to help our senior members perform such service. In Michigan, more than 52 percent of the Bar’s active resident members are 50 years and older and 23 percent 60 and older. We as senior lawyers need to find ways to put all that training and experience to good use, and the Bar needs to know how it can support that effort.

The “public at large who require the services of the profession” is still in need, in some ways just as much as in 1935. I am proud to join the company of Roberts P. Hudson, Burney Veum, and the other presidents of the State Bar of Michigan. Please join me this year in emphasizing the ways we as Michigan lawyers, particularly the senior lawyers among us, can serve the public. ■

FOOTNOTES

1. Turow, *The billable hour must die*, *ABA Journal*, August 2007, p 34.
2. Tebo, *Retired, then re-energized*, *ABA Journal*, April 2007, p 53.