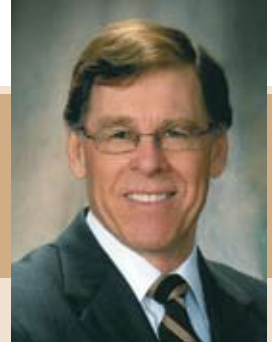


A Senior Moment for the State Bar

Moving Ahead to Channel the Bar's Next Great Resource



Ronald D. Keefe

As I have traveled around the state, I have been highlighting the fact that this Bar will have a significant number of lawyers reaching retirement age in the next several years. In Michigan, more than 52 percent of the Bar's active resident members are 50 years and older and 23 percent are 60 and older. That's a lot of lawyers.

I am part of this demographic, and like many of you, I am starting to think about what I will do with my profession as I get closer to "retirement," whatever that means. That is the big question, isn't it? What will retirement mean for the most senior members of our Bar? Talking with other lawyers in my age group around the state, I've learned that many of us are reaching the same conclusions about retirement. We are rethinking it. Somehow the old triumvirate of golf, gardening, and grandchildren will not be enough. We are in a profession of service, and now is the time to think about how we can use our hard-earned skills as lawyers to serve others. Retiring from a job as a lawyer need not be retirement from the profession.

The demographic shift in our profession presents an unprecedented opportunity. This year, I have issued a challenge to the other senior members of our State Bar to see where we can apply our experience to make our profession better serve the people of Michigan. Each of us needs to examine what we like about being lawyers, and see how we can channel our favorite aspects of practice into public-service opportunities in retirement. Think about it: our skills as lawyers enable us to do so much more for a nonprofit or a person in need than the average retired volunteer. Maybe your local Boys and Girls Club is trying to add on to its building, but is wrangling with the city about lot setback requirements. Perhaps the local historical society needs help struc-

turing its bylaws. Maybe a low-income family in your area needs help battling its landlord in court. A church or synagogue could be trying to rent space and needs a lawyer to walk it through a commercial lease. The opportunities are endless.

While each of us must find the service opportunity that fits our idea of retirement, your State Bar can provide support. This is why I have established a Senior Lawyers Section Planning Group to explore ways to promote and support an active senior bar in Michigan. To start, the group will explore creating a special section membership for senior lawyers that would be automatic and dues-free, much like our current Young Lawyers Section. The group is also charged with setting forth a two-year plan for activities and areas of focus for such a section. I expect it will look at ways the section could help create opportunities for senior lawyers to do pro bono and other volunteer work, start mentoring relationships with new lawyers, and establish programming related to retirement and cutting back or closing down law practices. The section's efforts may even include pursuit of a special volunteer law license, as exists in the practice of medicine (see section 16184 of the Public Health Code, MCL 333.16184).

I could not be more pleased with the roster of attorneys who have graciously

accepted my appointment to the Senior Lawyers Section Planning Group: Board of Commissioners members Lori A. Buiteweg, Ann Arbor; Brian D. Einhorn, Southfield; Robert K. Fergan, Ann Arbor; and Gregory L. Ulrich, Livonia, who will serve as chairperson; and, bringing their unique experiences to the table, State Bar members Hon. Harold Hood, Detroit; retired Michigan Court of Appeals Judge Richard D. McLellan, Lansing; and Asher N. Tilchin, Farmington Hills, chairperson of the current State Bar Senior Lawyers Section. Our efforts would not be possible without the support of two members of the State Bar staff in Lansing: Anne M. Vrooman, director of research and development; and Candace A. Crowley, director of external development. I thank both of them for the hard work and enthusiasm they have invested in this initiative to help propel it forward.

The Senior Lawyers Section Planning Group will be meeting during the next few weeks and has been given the charge to report its recommendations to the full Board of Commissioners in early 2008. I am excited about the possibilities we have open to us in an active senior section, and look forward to sharing the group's recommendations for a wider discussion. Stay tuned; there is more to come. In my view, this is the best kind of "senior moment." ■

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