

Continuum



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COn September 17, I humbly received the distinction of being sworn in as the 75th president of the State Bar of Michigan. Many lawyers have asked me what can be expected during my presidency. I answer that my term can be described in one word: continuum.

A continuum can be depicted in two temporal modes. One is a continuous set or series that is long term, say 75 years. The other is a more immediate continuous succession that may span several months. My presidency will be part of a continuum in both senses.

The State Bar adopted a long-range strategic plan eight years ago.¹ This plan is regularly reviewed, evaluated, and revised by your Board of Commissioners. One realized goal of our strategic plan has been to eliminate short-term presidential agendas, although each president can choose to emphasize specific programs or initiatives within the strategic plan. That is why my term as president can be described as a continuum—the continuation of effectively and efficiently implementing the State Bar's long-range strategic plan. It should be noted that this work is carried out by the highly skilled, dedicated, and loyal State Bar staff led by a visionary and inspirational executive director, Janet Welch.

An aspect of this long-term continuum is an ongoing fulfillment of the central purpose for which the State Bar was founded, as so frequently quoted in the eloquent words of the first State Bar president, Roberts P. Hudson: "No organization of lawyers can long exist which has not for its primary purpose the protection of the public." What better year to celebrate the many ways that lawyers carry out that mission and make a difference for people and society

than 2009–2010, the State Bar's 75th anniversary year?

For more than seven decades, Michigan lawyers have generously supported the legal profession's highest ideals by providing pro bono representation or financial donations, or both, to help nonprofit legal aid agencies. Our 75th-year celebration is also about the thousands of hours that lawyers have given to volunteer their time to benefit their communities. They serve on boards; provide law-related education; help community organizations and schools; coach; or participate in the activities of Habitat for

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Humanity, shelters, rescue missions, environmental watch groups, and other community services providers. The State Bar "A Lawyer Helps" program celebrates lawyer giving and provides resources to help lawyers continue to make a difference.²

Other long-term aspects of the State Bar continuum that will receive considerable attention in our anniversary year are access to justice; improving the administration of justice; provision of indigent criminal defense representation; lawyer collegiality and competence; member diversity, professionalism, ethics, and services; and representation of lawyers before the Michigan Supreme Court and legislature on important issues that affect the legal profession and the public. All these are a part of our strategic plan and will take on more importance during these critical and challenging times.

With the challenges of the present economy and the struggles facing the legal profession, the time is ripe for some strategic short-term initiatives. An example is our newly formed Judicial Crossroads Task Force. Past President Edward Pappas, in his three-part President's Page series titled "Judicial Independence in Crisis" in the May–July 2009 issues of the *Michigan Bar Journal*, chronicled the inadequate funding, inability to provide adequate access for all, and the politicization of state judiciaries as reasons that state courts are in crisis. The fundamentals of truth, equality, freedom, and justice have been historically protected and championed by our profession. These principles are inscribed in granite on the face of Michigan's Hall of Justice. Without an independent judiciary that is the embodiment of the rule of law, our society crumbles. It is unequivocal; our profession is committed to the fair, open, and principled administration of justice. The State Bar formed the Judicial Crossroads Task Force to develop ideas on how Michigan's court system can not only survive the current crisis, but transform itself to meet the evolving needs of the public more effectively than ever.

Another example of what's on the short-term continuum addresses the practice of law in the present economy. Our Practice Management Resource Center and our partner, the Institute of Continuing Legal Education, are independently presenting programs to assist attorneys in transition to different practice types or areas of law. Survival tactics are the order of the day in practice presentations. Keeping up with new technologies is imperative nowadays. Attorneys who can adapt quickly to the changing circumstances will benefit the most. The State Bar has been busy in its efforts to update, inform, and help our members so they can

be better practitioners. Consider this list of recently added programs and services:

- A powerful new free online legal resource tool
- An opinion and summary search engine to search the more than 38,000 e-Journal case summaries
- A new online video management system to host on the State Bar's website Michigan Supreme Court oral arguments, administrative conferences, and administrative hearings
- A mobile version of the member directory to make it easy to search the directory from your PDAs and smart phones
- A State Bar presence on social media networking sites Facebook and Twitter to keep media and others informed of State Bar happenings
- A comprehensive collaboration portal to facilitate the work of the State Bar's committees and sections and to make it easier for members to participate in the work of the Bar without having to leave home

Other technology-driven additions to the long- and short-term continua are sure to follow. Stay tuned.

Continuum does not mean stagnant or status quo. I predict that my year as the 75th president of the State Bar of Michigan will be filled with new challenges and the need for fresh approaches. The only constant is change. Our challenge is to make inevitable change consistent with the fundamental principles or missions that have been adopted for the Bar.

As State Bar president, I pledge to stay the course that has guided us for 75 years, as now set out in the Michigan Supreme Court Rules Concerning the State Bar of Michigan:

The State Bar of Michigan shall aid in promoting improvements in the administration of justice and advancements in jurisprudence, in improving relations between the legal profession and the public, and in promoting the interests of the legal profession in this state. ■

FOOTNOTES

1. See <<http://www.michbar.org/generalinfo/pdfs/strategicplan.pdf>>.
2. For more information about participating in "A Lawyer Helps," visit <<http://www.alawyerhelps.org>>.