

# Connectivity



Charles R. Toy

**A**s you probably realize by now, I have a scientific bent and enjoy juxtaposing concepts and words to unite very different disciplines. Humor me a little as I ponder a word that came to mind during my recent travels on behalf of the State Bar. What I observed in my first 30 days as president is just how connected we are as a profession. The word “connectivity” kept popping up in my mind. According to the dictionary, “connectivity” is defined as the quality or condition of being connected or something that connects.<sup>1</sup> There are two aspects to this definition—the first is a mode of being, i.e., connected; the second is an action or process, i.e., connecting.

Consider the following examples. On October 1, Cooley Law School held a ribbon-cutting ceremony to mark the opening of its Ann Arbor campus. Local judges and attorneys joined Cooley’s president, faculty, and students to celebrate new partnerships that a law school brings to a community. There is a connection between the Ann Arbor legal community and prospective attorneys.

That evening, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee in Michigan presented its annual Guardian of Justice Awards to Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Marilyn Kelly and Sixth Circuit United States Court of Appeals Judge Damon J. Keith. Another connection—this time between attorneys—that transcends ethnicity, national origin, race, and gender.

From October 2 to 4, I attended a meeting of the 84-member Ontario Bar Association Council, which had gathered to discuss governance, indigent criminal defense, pro bono legal assistance, and the wise use of provincial and federal resources in the administration of justice. This international connection highlighted the similarity of issues faced by our respective bars.



Left to right: Charles Toy; Canada’s Attorney General, the Hon. Rob Nicholson; and Ontario Bar Association President Carole Brown.

Photo by Steve Pengelly

From October 5 to 10, the annual Upper Peninsula State Bar Presidential Tour caravanned from Sault Ste. Marie to Ironwood and from Hancock to Menominee. Attorneys from every county in Michigan’s beautiful Upper Peninsula shared the same concerns expressed by attorneys in the Lower Peninsula, attesting to the connection among all Michigan attorneys. The combined 10-day, 2,135-mile trip vividly illustrated that lawyers are a community whose common concerns transcend geography and perceived differences based on practice area or firm size.

But what about the action or process of connectivity? That is where the State Bar comes in. Through new technologies and targeted initiatives, the State Bar is connecting attorneys. The communication landscape is no longer centralized from the State Bar to members, but has increased exponentially to allow communication between and among members as well. Sections and committees are the perennial means of con-

necting attorneys with similar subject matter or practice area interests. Because it is not economical or practical for an Ironwood attorney to make the 1,180-mile journey to Lansing for a two-hour meeting—a round trip of more than 22 hours by car, where windshield time is 11 times longer than meeting time—the Bar has worked to develop innovative means of inclusion.

In addition to several well-established ways members stay connected—the e-Journal, the Bar’s toll-free ethics helplines, the Practice Management Resource Center, the Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program, and the State Bar website, to name a few<sup>2</sup>—the Bar has recently enhanced the capability for members to pay dues, make address changes, and register for events online; made it easier for members and the public to locate Michigan’s lawyers through the State Bar website; and allowed law students seeking to take the Michigan Bar exam to complete a bar application online.

In the works are these additional new technologies that will allow Michigan attorneys to connect economically and efficiently:

- A new extranet portal for Bar-related entities to track calendared events, edit shared documents, and electronically store such things as minutes, contact rosters, and governing documents. The endeavor, called SharePoint, will be launched on a pilot basis this fall through two State Bar committees.
- Enhanced use of videoconferencing for meetings, as these technologies have become more elegant in real time while also becoming more economically feasible.

As new technologies become available, the State Bar will continue to monitor and implement ways for attorneys to remain connected. The State Bar will serve as the active agent in connectivity.

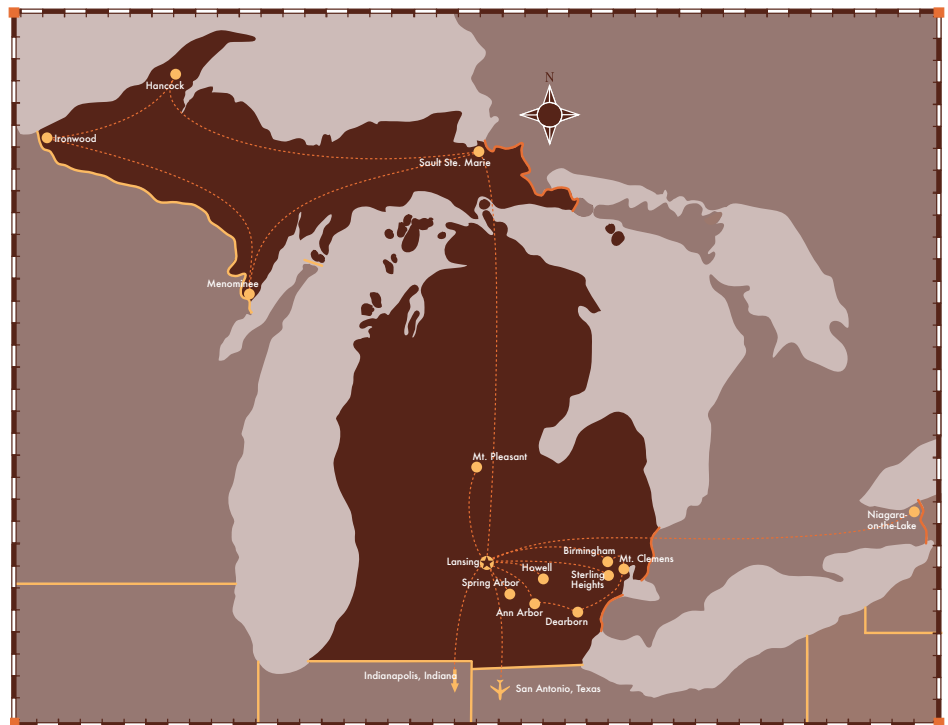
The rich diversity of our membership—culturally, racially, by gender, in viewpoint, and ideologically—coupled with our collective impulse toward connectivity with one another, our clients, the justice system, and the public can only result in excellence: an excellence in achieving the core principles of our profession in serving and protecting the public, improving the legal profession in Michigan, and promoting access to justice for all. ■

## FOOTNOTES

1. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (2004).
2. To subscribe to the e-journal, visit <http://www.michbar.org/publications/signup.cfm>. For ethics questions, contact the Attorney Ethics Helpline at (877) 558-4760 or the Judges Ethics Helpline at (877) 558-4761. Additional resources include the Practice Management Resource Center, (800) 341-9715; the Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program, (800) 996-5522; and, for general member service questions, (800) 968-1442. The State Bar's website is [www.michbar.org](http://www.michbar.org).



A delegation from the State Bar held a meeting with members of the Alger-Luce-Schoolcraft Bar Association during the U.P. Tour. Pictured left to right: Attorney Charles Nebel and his son, 5th Probate Court Judge Charlie Nebel; Charles Toy; Candace Crowley; Elizabeth Moehle Johnson; and attorneys Kathryn Denholm and Chad Peltier.



This map reflects the travels of Charles Toy during his first month as State Bar president.

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