

Up Front

By Samantha Meinke



- Ontario Bar Association President Carole Brown and SBM President Charles Toy
- SBM Executive Director Janet Welch and Federal Bar Association Executive Director Brian Figot, a BLF speaker

- SBM Board of Commissioners meeting at the Grand Hotel
- Thomas Plunkett, Thomas Ryan, Ronald Keefe, Edward Pappas, and Reginald Turner are joined by John Nussbaumer
- SBM Commissioner Donald Rockwell, Diane Rockwell, SBM President-Elect W. Anthony Jenkins, and SBM Rep. Assembly Clerk Stephen Gobbo

BLF 2010



- Social media expert and BLF speaker David Barrett
- OBA President Carole Brown and Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Marilyn Kelly
- SBM Rep. Assembly Vice Chair Victoria Radke and RA Clerk Stephen Gobbo

State Bar's 35th Legal Milestone Focuses on Pigeon River Elk vs. Oil Drilling Dispute

The dedication ceremony for the State Bar of Michigan's 35th Legal Milestone, "Elk, Oil and the Environment," was held on Wednesday, June 9, at Treetops Resort's Wilderness Cabin near Gaylord.

The milestone focuses on the decade-long battle that took place in the 1970s over drilling for oil and gas in northeast Michigan's Pigeon River Country Forest. The 91,000-acre forest—which sits on huge reserves of oil and natural gas and is home to a substantial elk herd—was the scene of one of the longest, most controversial environmental battles in Michigan history. Oil companies and environmental groups engaged in a series of lawsuits, consent orders, legislation, and compromises.

A 1979 landmark Michigan Supreme Court case (*West Michigan Environmental Action Group v Natural Resources Commission*) eventually led to an extraordinary agreement between state government, the oil industry, and environmental groups. It allowed tightly regulated drilling in the southern one-third of the forest, which decades later has yielded valuable gas and oil reserves while the elk herd has continued to grow.

Speakers at the ceremony included Roger L. Conner, former executive director of the West Michigan Environmental Action Council; Webb A. Smith, a partner at Foster, Swift, Collins & Smith in Lansing, who represented Shell Oil Co.; Hon. Thomas L. Brown, a retired Ingham County Circuit Court judge who heard the case at trial; and Kenneth Glasser, chairperson of the Pigeon River Advisory Council, a group that was formed to monitor the forest following the outcome of this case.

"The Pigeon River dispute and ultimate resolution is just as relevant today as it was 30



From left to right: Michael Ellis, chairperson of the State Bar's Law-Related Education and Public Outreach Michigan Legal Milestone Subcommittee; Hon. Thomas L. Brown, retired Ingham County Circuit Court judge; Webb Smith, partner with Foster, Swift, Collins & Smith; Roger Conner, adjunct professor of law at Vanderbilt University Law School; Kenneth Glasser, immediate past chairperson of the Pigeon River Advisory Council; and Charles Toy, president of the State Bar of Michigan, stand with the 35th Michigan Legal Milestone plaque.

years ago," said State Bar President Charles Toy, who shared master of ceremony duties with State Bar Executive Director Janet Welch. "It not only set standards for oil drilling in Michigan, but it became a national and international model for resource management."

The State Bar's Michigan Legal Milestone program was developed in 1986 to authenticate and recognize historical landmarks in Michigan's legal history. The program is overseen by the Bar's Michigan Legal Milestones Subcommittee, chaired by Michael Ellis, which is part of the Bar's Law-Related Education and Public Outreach Committee, chaired by Jeffrey Paulsen.

To see video and a photo gallery from this dedication ceremony or for more information on this or the other 34 Michigan Legal Milestones, visit <http://www.michbar.org/programs/milestones.cfm>. ■



The outcome of the case celebrated by the 35th Michigan Legal Milestone was to protect the elk herd in the Pigeon River Country area, which today is the largest free-roaming elk herd east of the Mississippi, while also allowing for economic development.

State Bar Hosts “Nurture the Power of Pro Bono” Workshop



State Bar of Michigan photo

Attendees of the State Bar's May 26 Pro Bono Workshop learned that there is no way the 180 legal aid attorneys in the state can possibly represent the 17,666 eligible low-income people that may need their services. During these tough economic times, pro bono services are needed more than ever to help indigent people find access to our justice system.

Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Marilyn J. Kelly kicked off “Nurture the Power of Pro Bono” by telling legal aid leaders she understands how the poor economy in Michigan is inundating them with requests for help. She cited a statistic that there are only 180 legal aid lawyers out of 32,535 active attorneys in Michigan. That leaves each legal aid attorney with about 17,666 eligible low-income clients.

“What, if any, good news is there in all of this?” Kelly asked. “If there is to be any good news, we have to make it... There are many bright spots due to the attorneys who stepped up to fill the legal services gaps in their communities.”

The workshop tackled issues such as maintaining volunteer enthusiasm and commitment through recognition, challenges to delivering pro bono services in rural areas,

getting the judiciary involved in pro bono programs, and pro bono cases best suited to law school resources.

The workshop ended with a request that all pro bono programs in Michigan create a plan to actively participate in Pro Bono Month this October. For more information on pro bono work in Michigan, visit the State Bar's Pro Bono Initiative online at <http://www.michbar.org/programs/ATJ/home.cfm>. ■

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