



# CONSTITUTION DAY, MICHIGAN LEGAL MILESTONES, AND LAW-RELATED EDUCATION

State Bar of Michigan Programs that Engage the Broader Community

By Matthew E. Krichbaum, Allan T. Motzny, and Monica Nuckolls

**T**he State Bar of Michigan has always played an active role in the lives of Michigan citizens by making law-related education a top priority. Law-related education equips nonlawyers, both young and old, with knowledge and skills pertaining to the law, the legal process, the legal system, and the fundamental principles and values on which they are based. While many Michiganders are familiar with Law Day, it is only one of many programs sponsored by the State Bar to help expand and deepen law-related education in the community. The State Bar also sponsors Constitution Day and Michigan Legal Milestones programs and participates in several other outreach efforts. This is done under the guidance of three subcommittees of the Law Related Education & Public Outreach Committee with the goal of producing educated, civic-minded citizens who wish

## Fast Facts

Law Day is only one of the many programs sponsored by the State Bar to help expand and deepen law-related education.

We urge you to become more involved in the law-related education activities taking place in your community.

to give back to their communities. This article explains how these subcommittees carry out this goal and provides information about this year's programs.

## Constitution Day

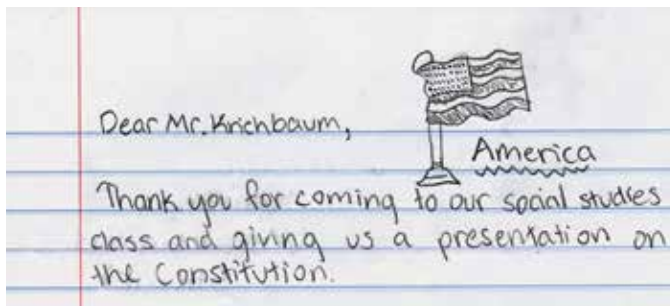
In 2004, the United States Congress enacted legislation requiring schools that receive federal funding to designate September 17 as Constitution Day. Through the participation and cooperation of educators and State Bar members, students learn about their rights and responsibilities as citizens as established by the U.S. Constitution.

On September 17, 2013, lawyers will visit classrooms across the state to lead K–12 students in dynamic and engaging lessons about the Constitution. This event gives State Bar members the opportunity to interact with the community, introduce students to the legal system, and demonstrate the Constitution's effect on our everyday lives.

One of the great things about Constitution Day is it doesn't require a huge time commitment. Participating attorneys can prepare in as little as one hour, and each class is generally an hour long. This means any attorney can get involved and volunteer for an amount of time tailored to his or her schedule.

Oakland County, Washtenaw County, and Grand Rapids already have successful programs in place and are always looking for additional volunteers. If your local community does not have an established Constitution Day program, the State Bar's planning guide can help you start one; visit [http://www.michbar.org/generalinfo/pdfs/constitutionday\\_timeline.pdf](http://www.michbar.org/generalinfo/pdfs/constitutionday_timeline.pdf). Early communication and planning with local educators can make a big difference. Our website offers several detailed lesson plans for sixth, seventh, and eighth grades and provides links to lesson plans for other grades. The website also provides several resources to prepare for classroom presentations.

Participation generally includes being assigned to one or more classrooms in an established program or contacting local schools to find interested teachers and administrators. PowerPoint lesson plans on the website have proven to be successful in the past, meaning your preparation time can be simply downloading a file and familiarizing yourself with the presentation. The lessons include 10 minutes of teaching before challenging students to tackle constitutional problems on their own.



A sixth-grade student's thank-you letter.

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Though it requires a limited time commitment, the significance of this program should not be understated. It introduces students to the Constitution in new and interesting ways while creating an opportunity for attorneys to give back to their communities and educate the leaders of tomorrow. Attorneys who have participated in the past say the most rewarding part of the experience was interacting with and engaging the students. This is a unique opportunity to help shape the young minds of tomorrow and ensure that students have an understanding of the Constitution and their rights and duties.

We've received excellent feedback from attorneys who have gone into classrooms, but the student response confirms the program's value. In one thank-you letter, a student wrote, "Thank you Mr. K for coming to talk about Constitution Day. I thought the lesson was really nice because we don't get to learn about law in our classes."

The Constitution is a subject that should not be overlooked in our classrooms; you have the opportunity to make sure that doesn't happen. For information about existing programs or to take part in Constitution Day, contact Constitution Day Subcommittee Chairperson Matthew Krichbaum at [matthew@srkllp.com](mailto:matthew@srkllp.com) or visit <http://www.constitutionday.info>.

## Michigan Legal Milestones

Another way the State Bar leads efforts to increase public knowledge of the legal system and the rule of law is through its Michigan Legal Milestones program. The program, which began in 1986 and currently functions under the guidance of the SBM



Law Related Education & Public Outreach Committee, received an Award of Merit from the Historical Society of Michigan and a first-place Crystal Award for outstanding community service from the Public Relations Society of Michigan. In 2012, SBM Director of Member Services and Communications Nancy Brown was presented with the Michigan Historical Commission's Gov. John B. Swainson Award for outstanding contributions to preserving Michigan's history for her work on behalf of the program.

The Michigan Legal Milestones program commemorates significant legal cases, events, places, and personalities in Michigan's history by placing bronze plaques throughout the state. Each plaque describes the milestone's historical significance and its impact on Michigan law and its citizens. Thirty-seven legal milestone markers are currently located in Michigan, including one on Mackinac Island and four in the Upper Peninsula. The first legal milestone in 1986 commemorated the historic Ossian Sweet trials in Detroit; the plaque was placed inside the Frank Murphy Hall of Justice. Most of the plaques are in outdoor public locations, but some are displayed inside public buildings. The permanent location for each milestone is generally at a location with a connection to the case, event, or personality.

An additional benefit of the program is the wealth of information catalogued on the Michigan Legal Milestones website at <http://www.michbar.org/programs/milestones.cfm>. The website provides significant facts about each milestone, a map showing the location of each plaque, and a timeline showing the dates of each milestone. It also includes a list of resource materials and, starting with the 34th Michigan Legal Milestone—"From a Whisper to a Rallying Cry," commemorating the Vincent Chin case—a link to the dedication ceremony videos. Website visitors can also submit recommendations for future Michigan Legal Milestones.

Milestone dedication ceremonies, generally held at locations relevant to the subjects being commemorated, are extraordinary events. The State Bar's executive director and current president preside as masters of ceremony. Traditionally, the individuals invited to attend or speak at the ceremonies have had specialized knowledge of the particular subject and, in some cases, were directly involved or connected with the milestone. For example, the ceremony for the 37th Michigan Legal Milestone, "Landmark Law Advancing Equal Opportunity: The Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act," took place at the state Capitol in Lansing, and Daisy Elliott and Mel Larsen—the Michigan legislators who sponsored the original law—both attended. Many ceremonies feature historical displays related to the milestone and a PowerPoint presentation with photographs from past dedications.

The milestone program offers an opportunity for other organizations to work with the State Bar in its efforts to provide law-related education to the public. Each year, the State Bar seeks a local or special-purpose bar association or other community organization to serve as its partner in the milestone dedication. Recent partners include the Davis-Dunnings Bar Association, the Michigan Asian Pacific American Bar Association, and the Detroit Metropolitan Bar Association.

The milestone program also collaborates with other State Bar programs, including Law Day. The State Bar's Law Day contest



Photo by Tammy Allen for the State Bar of Michigan

Former Michigan Representatives Mel Larsen and Daisy Elliott at the Michigan Legal Milestone dedication ceremony on August 28 at the state Capitol in Lansing.

requires entrants to develop a project linking the year's theme with one of the Michigan Legal Milestones. The winning entry for 2012 came from a group of talented fifth graders who produced a video reenacting the Roosevelt-Newett Libel Trial—the subject of the fourth Michigan Legal Milestone. This collaboration is one of the many ways the State Bar continues to educate the public and enhance its leadership role in statewide law-related education.

## Law-Related Education

In spring 2009, the State Bar invited more than 50 lawyers, judges, teachers, and school administrators to a summit to brainstorm ways to expand and deepen law-related education in Michigan. Since then, various State Bar committees and groups have worked tirelessly to find innovative ways to educate others about the law and encourage lawyers and nonlawyers alike to take an active role in the effort.

Since the summit, one major accomplishment of the Law Related Education Subcommittee of the Law Related Education & Public Outreach Committee is the development of an online clearinghouse of resources for people participating in law-related education activities. For example, an attorney who has agreed to

speak at a school can find resources to help develop an appropriate lesson plan for students. The clearinghouse is on the State Bar's website at <http://www.michbar.org/generalinfo/lawlinks.cfm> and includes:

- a statewide resource list, including a summary of law-related education programs and services and a list of existing partnerships and collaborations supporting law-related education in Michigan
- integrated diversity pipeline strategies for current law-related education activities
- quality law-related education materials, some of which are customized for Michigan
- research on effective law-related education activities
- links to relevant national websites
- tools to connect lawyers and educators
- strategies and resources to connect law-related professionals and the legal community with untapped resources, e.g., police and probation officers, social workers, houses of faith, and community centers
- simple tools to guide the evaluation of law-related education programs

The “We the People” program is designed to help students discover the relevance of the Constitution and Bill of Rights. The program culminates with students participating in a simulated congressional hearing.

Following the 2009 summit, the State Bar has renewed and strengthened partnerships with organizations that share the goal of expanding law-related education in Michigan. For example, the State Bar works closely with the Michigan Center for Civic Education, a nonprofit organization it helped create 30 years ago to connect the legal profession with schools. The center's executive director is an advisor to the Law Related Education & Public

Outreach Committee and plays a key role in many of its outreach efforts, and the State Bar actively participates in and supports the center's annual Michigan High School Mock Trial Tournament. The tournament is a unique learning opportunity in which students assume the roles of attorneys and compete against one another in real courtrooms. In recent years, the number of participants in the tournament has increased dramatically and become more diverse. Bar members serve as judges and coaches, and not only evaluate the students' performances but also encourage their continued appetite for legal knowledge and development as critical thinkers.

Bar members also take part in other programs sponsored by the Michigan Center for Civic Education, including its “We the People” program, designed to help students discover the relevance of the Constitution and Bill of Rights. The program culminates with students participating in a simulated congressional hearing.

The Michigan Center for Civic Education sponsors many other law-related education programs for teachers and members of the community. Visit <http://www.miciviced.org> for information on becoming involved with these activities.

The opportunities to give back to your community and take an active role in law-related education are endless, and the State Bar of Michigan is dedicated to expanding law-related education throughout the state. However, this can't be done without the continued support of its members. We urge you to become more involved in law-related education activities taking place in your community. ■



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