

This Message is Brought to You By Will Kramer



Bruce A. Courtade



On June 27, 2013, William M. Kramer III passed away at the age of 47 after battling cancer for several years.

So what? I am sure dozens of people in Michigan died that day, perhaps some of whom were family members or friends of those reading this column right now. I am sure each passing brought great sorrow to that person's family and friends, so why am I spending time in my column telling you about Mr. Kramer?

If you are a Bar junkie or a techno geek, or if you occasionally peruse the State Bar's website or read the e-Journal, you might recognize Will's name: for 13 years, he served as the State Bar's director of information technology services. Indeed, the fact that you could read about his passing on the website or in the e-Journal is due in no small part to the amazing work Will accomplished during his time at the Bar.

He was instrumental in bringing about and implementing technological advances that brought the Bar from what at times seemed to be a Commodore-based mish-mash of hard-wired, standalone computers that quite often could not communicate with each other to a fully functioning, efficient network that not only allows Bar staff to communicate and corroborate more effectively, but allows the organization to provide more and better services to its members. The Practice Management Resource Center could not function without the work Will did building the necessary infrastructure. The website would not work nearly as well. The phone system would probably still be dumping calls from our members and the public into "voice-mail hell."

In short, Will did outstanding work for the State Bar of Michigan and whether you realize it or not, every person reading this



William M. Kramer III

column (and many more who have never heard of the *Michigan Bar Journal*) benefitted from the work Will did without fanfare or recognition (although SBM Executive Director Janet Welch made sure the Board of Commissioners and SBM officers always knew what a great job Will was doing).

Ah, so that's it? That's why I am writing about Will: to posthumously thank him for the work he did for the State Bar and its members? Well...yes and no.

It is true that I am grateful for everything Will did for the Bar until his illness finally prevented him from doing any more. But I already thanked Will while he was with us, and I had the bittersweet opportunity to express my gratitude to his wife, Suzie, at the funeral home when I stopped by his visitation. (I confess now that while I spoke to Suzie, I was unable to express my condolences to Will's 17-year-old son, Kiv, or his 15-year-old daughter, Allie. At the time, I convinced myself it was because they were surrounded by friends and I did not want to interrupt them, but in truth, I had no words to express my sorrow to them over the loss of their father. If they ever get a chance to read this column, I hope they accept this coward's apology and belated condolences.)

But Will's passing prompted me to recall, once again, what an amazing group of people work at your State Bar, how fortunate our membership is to have them toiling away—often in anonymity—doing the fine work that allows our organization to accomplish so much for its members and the public, and how incredibly grateful I am for having been given the opportunity to work with and get to know so many of them during my years on the Representative

Whether you realize it or not, every person reading this column (and many more who have never heard of the *Michigan Bar Journal*) benefitted from the work Will did without fanfare or recognition.

The purpose of this month's column is to introduce you to some of your amazing State Bar staff members and encourage you to take the time to look around and acknowledge those in your lives whose work too often goes unnoticed.

Assembly and Board of Commissioners, and particularly over the course of the last 11 months when I have had the privilege of serving as your president. Our staff is such a truly remarkable amalgamation of people—with different experiences, accomplishments, and backgrounds—that one cannot capture in a single column, nor even a full year as president, just how great a group it is or what impressive work they do every day to make things better for those of us who make a living as lawyers *and* for the public who rely on access to a fair and impartial justice system.

Did you know that one of our staff members, who started as a receptionist and now works in finance, came to the United States from East Germany (for anyone with a P number higher than 70000, look it up in Wikipedia: there used to be two different Germanies!) and took a job at the Bar in part because of the work it does to protect our individual liberties? Or that another staff member, a fan of history in general and Abraham Lincoln in particular, was literally shaking with excitement when she attended the Federal Bar Association of Western Michigan's 150th anniversary celebration featuring a band dressed in period costumes playing Civil War-era music and a speech by a Lincoln impersonator? Or that we have a woman working in the Executive Office who in her spare time sits on the board for the Lansing Board of Water and Light, chairs the Capital Area District Library Board, and organizes a golf outing every year for a local charity seeking to end domestic violence in the Lansing area? (And that woman is *not* our executive director.) Or that we

have people working for us who previously worked for the Supreme Court, served as chief of staff for the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and acted as editor of *Michigan Lawyers Weekly*?

I could go on and on—indeed, part of the problem with beginning a list like this is inadvertently slighting others by not including them or telling their fascinating stories. If I have done so, please forgive me. And I could tell you the names of each of the examples I cited in the preceding paragraph, but that would undermine the purpose of this column.

My purpose in writing this month's column is three-fold. First, to assure you that your interests are being well taken care of by Executive Director Janet Welch and the incredible staff with whom she works—a dedicated, hardworking group of people whose efforts make a real difference in the lives of our members and the public. Second, I encourage you to get to know the State Bar staff and to make use of their talents. From the moment you walk in the front door and are greeted by Geana or Gwen, or when Sam helps you figure out how to use social media to benefit your practice (e.g., how to tweet and become “twitterate”), or Peter provides insight into pending legislation, or Nkrumah answers your ethics helpline question, I am confident you will be pleased with how you are treated and the assistance you receive from those with whom you meet. Third, this column gives me a chance to thank the State Bar staff for all they do every day, often without recognition or acknowledgement, that is so vital to allowing the Bar to fulfill

its mission of protecting the public and serving its members.

So there you have it. The purpose of this month's column is to introduce you to some of your amazing State Bar staff members and encourage you to take the time to look around and acknowledge those in your lives whose work too often goes unnoticed.

In closing, I want to take a moment to let you know that, in addition to all that he did for the State Bar, Will Kramer was an amazing man: a proud father who had the incredible good fortune of meeting and marrying the love of his life at any early age, with whom he had two wonderful children. He was incredibly kind, humble, and generous of spirit. When I was at the funeral home for his visitation, I read an essay his daughter had written in which she described her hero: a man whom cancer hunted despite living an incredibly healthy lifestyle, in part because he had lost his brother to cancer and did not want to inflict that pain on his own family; who beat cancer once only to have it hunt him down again; and who despite his illness continued to fight bravely and love madly. Janet Welch put it perfectly in her message to staff when Will's battle was near its end:

Even before his illness, Will Kramer served as exceptional role model at the Bar for integrity, diligence, dignity, and kindness. He was the key player in making the State Bar of Michigan technologically competent and he played an indispensable role in its management. As he has struggled through the challenges of his illness, however, he has also become something even more important—an extraordinary example about how to live. No one ever fought harder to stay ahead of a deadly, advancing disease; no one has faced the fight with a more positive or selfless spirit.

Will was also a man of great faith and, therefore, I end this column with the sincere hope and firm belief that when his body finally gave up the fight to which his spirit refused to yield, he heard the words I know he longed to hear: “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Well done, indeed. ■