

## LAWYERS AND SOCIETY



Thomas J. Ryan

*First thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers.*

Henry VI, Part II by William Shakespeare

This quote is often used by those who seek to blame lawyers for many, sometimes all, of society's ills. That these words come from no less than William Shakespeare is supposed to show that lawyers must be at fault—because they always have been.

The truth, revealed by the context, is much different. Actually, Jack Cade and his

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fellow conspirators were plotting anarchy for their own personal benefit. They threatened to “Burn all records, my mouth shall be the Parliament of England.” Shakespeare, thus, illustrated the simple truth that it is not enough to destroy the rules; to bring down an orderly system of justice, the lawyers must

be eliminated because they give life and meaning to the rules.

Then, as now, lawyers, judges, advocates, counselors, and legislators are an integral part of a system of laws and justice that foster the economic, cultural, and community freedoms so essential to a progressive society. Nowhere else in the world do commerce and industry flourish because of the predictability and commercial certainty that our country enjoys. People flock to our shores because of the unparalleled political, cultural, and religious freedoms that have been maintained by lawyers and judges working to enforce the rights of everyone.

It is for these very same reasons that the blame comes our way in the collective public perception. We are in the heart of most every dispute, from child custody contests to neighbors' boundary suits, to anti-trust breakups, and even the Florida election battles. We are literally entwined in people's problems and their solutions. Even as we may win the gratitude and respect of our individual clients, all too often the opposition blames their fate on the lawyers.

There is no magic potion to cure this issue. The real winner, however, is the society that has an established, fair, efficient, peaceful means of dispute resolution. We cannot and should not change who we are or what we do because of society's perception of us.

*No other profession places itself in the center of civilization's firestorms, taking unpopular positions regardless of profession consequences... none carries the burden of continuously involving itself in situations damaging to its public image.*

“I'm Proud to Be a Lawyer,”

Hon. Gene Schnelz, MJB, May 1994

In that article my good friend, Judge Schnelz, described the many facets of the valuable volunteer efforts that lawyers make individually and as a group. Since that time, I have witnessed my fellow attorneys being more and more involved in their communities, schools, and charitable organizations. The State Bar has expanded its reach with programs like Access to Justice Development Campaign, Law School for Legislators, and Pro Bono Involvement.

There are so many important ways that lawyers and judges add immeasurably to our society that, when you think of it, without lawyers and judges dedicated to the rule of law, tempered by freedom, justice, and equality, our society, even with all its problems, would not have progressed to the level that it is at today. There is no question that lawyers and judges working together in the system of justice are the bulwark of our democratic system of government; they are indispensable to a free society that respects the viewpoints of all.

It is important to periodically remind ourselves of all the good we do. Our mission is too important to compromise merely for the sake of popularity. We survive and flourish because we heed the admonition of the State Bar of Michigan's first president, Roberts P. Hudson:

*No organization of lawyers can long survive which has not for its primary objective the protection of the public.*

We should continue our good work for its own sake. It may serve to burnish our public image. If our important role in society means we are destined to take the blame, we should wear it with pride.

### Initiatives for the Bar Year

A primary goal of the officers, Executive Committee, and the Board of Commissioners is to strengthen and enhance our relationships with the various constituent groups throughout the state. It seems to me vitally



important that all the entities involved with the courts on a daily basis work together whenever possible to ensure that our citizens have the best justice system possible.

To that end, we have rededicated our efforts to support our major constituent group, the Michigan Supreme Court. Although the Supreme Court has regulatory authority over our profession, it is also an extremely important participant in issues concerning the procedure, practice of law, and the judicial system that we deal with on a daily basis. In my judgment, the leadership of the State Bar of Michigan and the Supreme Court should work together on these many areas of common interest.

The State Bar has always had excellent cooperation with each Chief Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court. However, I believe that regular structured contact can enhance that relationship and better serve the public and our profession.

So, I am pleased to announce that on Tuesday, January 16, 2001, we held the first in a series of planned quarterly meetings between the Executive Committee of the State Bar and the justices of the Supreme Court. All seven Supreme Court justices came to the Michael Franck Building for a tour of the newly renovated facilities and dinner. It was apparent to all that this was an important first step in improving communications and our working relationship. Between these quarterly meetings, there will be at least one meeting, or other meetings as needed, between the Bar president, president-elect, and executive director, along with the Chief Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court and perhaps a justice she may designate as liaison to the State Bar.

The State Bar will also outreach to the governor's office, legislative leaders, attorney general, Attorney Grievance Commission, Attorney Discipline Board, ICLE, the local and special purpose bars, as well as committees and sections of the State Bar. All of this is to ensure that this organization is moving forward in a positive fashion to improve the justice system, profession, and the practice of law. I trust the membership will find these initiatives positive and helpful to our profession. ◆