

UpFront

By Steve Thorpe

Focus at Young Lawyers Section Summit is on Lawyers Helping

The jurist who gave the keynote address and the young attorney honored with a top award agreed in their remarks that focusing on helping people is what the law is about.

Both shared this message at the State Bar of Michigan Young Lawyers Section 8th Annual Summit at the Greektown Casino and Hotel in Detroit on May 30.

Michigan Supreme Court Justice Richard Bernstein, recipient of the Young Lawyers Section's 2004 Outstanding Young Lawyer Award, delivered the luncheon keynote address.

"You hear the question, 'What makes a good lawyer?'" Bernstein asked. "Some say it's all about the pedigree or it's all about what school you go to. It's all about the résumé. Based on my experience, what makes a great lawyer or great jurist is life experience. It's empathy. It's understanding. It's compassion."

Takura Nyamfukudza, an associate at Alane & Chartier PLC in Lansing, received this year's Regeana Myrick Outstanding Young Lawyer Award. He emphasized that whether the charge is a minor misdemeanor or a major felony, his focus is on the client and his or her needs.

"We represent our clients, their families, and all the people who matter to them," he said. "Clients come to me in a time of desperation. I treat each of them the way I would hope someone would treat my mother or sister."

"I'm a criminal defense lawyer," he added. "That's the only job guaranteed in the Constitution and not one that I take lightly. I may be new to this profession, but I'm true to it."

In 1997, the SBM Young Lawyers Section renamed its Outstanding Young Lawyer Award in honor of Regeana Myrick, a member of the YLS Executive Council who died in August

of that year. Myrick served on the council and was committed to education and public service.

Nyamfukudza became emotional and had to pause during his acceptance speech as he emphasized the role that support from family and coworkers has played in his success. His mother and sister were the strongest influences, he said.



Takura Nyamfukudza and his mother Thandi Kanjanda are all smiles after he received the Regeana Myrick Outstanding Young Lawyer Award.

Photos by Steve Thorpe



Members of the SBM Young Lawyers Section Executive Committee. Back row, left to right: Jerome Crawford, Mark Jane (YLS chair-elect), Laura Marji, Ryan Zemke, Andrea Irons (YLS chair), Mwanaisha Sims, Matt Breuer, Laura Kubit, and Donald Rencher. Front row: Tanya Cripps, Syeda Davidson (YLS treasurer), Stephanie Farkas, Choi Portis, Shenique Moss (YLS secretary), Samantha Orvis, Hope Shovein (YLS ex officio), and Ryan Plecha. Not pictured: Elizabeth Abdnour, Jade Edwards, Aysha Kasham, Kara Hart-Negrich, Zane Hatahet, and Roberta Sacharski.

"Because this award isn't made out of Legos, I can't give a piece of it to each person in this room who helped me," he said.



Michigan Supreme Court Justice Richard Bernstein delivers the luncheon keynote address.

Mary Chartier, one of the two cofounders of Alane & Chartier PLC whom Nyamfukudza referred to as his additional "moms," introduced him.

"Takura is a passionate criminal defense litigator," she said. "He's extremely hard working. He's also very energetic, as everyone in the office knows. He 'high fives' more than anybody. Once he was so excited that he was going to be second chair in an attempted murder trial, he high-fived me so enthusiastically that I almost fell down the stairs. Takura doesn't take himself too seriously, but he takes the practice of law extremely seriously, as all his clients can attest."

The event offered education and guidance as well as networking, speeches, and awards.

Seminars offered included "How to Prepare Your Client for Mediation," "Deposition Skills," "Tips and Tricks of Voir Dire, Opening and Closing Arguments," "Direct

and Cross Examination," "Drug and Veteran Specialty Courts," "Juvenile Abuse and Neglect Cases," and "Research and Writing."

In addition, there was a panel on "Benefits of Networking and Leadership" and sessions on family law and criminal law updates and preliminary exam statute changes. ■



Steve Thorpe owns Ghost Bay Communications, a small Michigan communications company providing writing and photography support for projects and publications. He is a former newspaper reporter, photojournalist, editor, and corporate software/web developer with more than 35 years of experience. He has worked as deputy photography editor at The Detroit News, staff writer at the Detroit Legal News, and director of photography and deputy features/science editor at The Ann Arbor News.