

Ever Better



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We are fortunate that the State Bar of Michigan has a solid history of service and responsiveness to its members. These accomplishments are all the more significant to us as lawyers because membership is a mandatory prerequisite to practicing law in our state.

Perhaps the most substantial improvements occurred during the recent distinguished service of Executive Director Michael Franck. During his nearly 25 years guiding our growth, Michael Franck, together with the Board of Commissioners and Representative Assembly, formulated policies, practices, and procedures that built the strong structure on which we rely and on which we have become comfortable.

With the death of Michael Franck an era ended. What he left us was an enduring legacy of service and a strong foundation from which we can build. Now, the leadership of the State Bar feels the appointment of John T. Berry, as our new executive director, provides us an excellent opportunity to take a fresh look at how our association might improve. Our goal is to do an even better job of meeting the changing needs of our member

attorneys as we tackle the growing complexities of life, the practice of law, and the justice system in the 21st Century. These challenges ahead demand no less than a complete re-appraisal of every aspect of our Bar's structure and services.

This reevaluation process has already begun by Executive Director Berry's examination of the internal structure of our Bar's staff. The Board of Commissioners has approved his restructuring proposals, which address a significant growth of the staff that occurred during the Michael Franck years and was necessary to accommodate the ever-increasing demands thrust upon our association and our staff.

Specifically, highly capable individuals have been designated as directors to run the various departments within the guidelines, procedures, and fiscal policy established by the Board of Commissioners. These new directors will report directly to the executive director, thus, making the best use of his limited time and availability. We believe this reorganization will better utilize the immense talents of our executive director by his delegating to good people the responsibility of their departments, and allowing the executive director to focus on the broader issues and concerns affecting our profession and the justice system.

The Board of Commissioners has appointed a Strategic Planning Committee to evaluate our association's committee structure. Over the course of the last two decades, the number and diversity of our committees grew almost exponentially, mirroring our effort to involve a broad variety of members

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and their views, and address the changes in our profession. The Strategic Planning Committee, chaired by President-Elect Bruce W. Neckers of Grand Rapids, has been conducting this examination to ensure that our committee organizational structure is in compliance with our bylaws, and more important, that it is organized to best use the time and talents of our members who volunteered their services to these committees.

Next, the Fiscal Committee, chaired by Treasurer Nancy Diehl of Detroit, is examining the budget and looking for ways to reinvigorate the budget process to ensure that the limited financial resources of the State Bar are targeted to match the goals set by the Board of Commissioners for our association. Under the guidance of Lisa Allen-Kost, director of programs and services, we are reviewing ways to increase our nondues revenue, so that we can maximize and leverage the special market created by our 33,000 members.

However, if we are to truly improve upon our foundation of the past, we must find ways to communicate with our members even better. Communication is the essential ingredient for improving service. In the past, the State Bar has used various formats to assess the needs and concerns of the membership. Surveys, telephone polling, and ad hoc discussions by leaders of the Bar with members, have all helped our leadership to understand what the association can and should do to improve. I have continued this tradition during my tenure, as I travel around the state, by soliciting from every group I meet with their ideas about what the State Bar can do differently or better to improve our service to them and our members. This informal process has been very helpful in understanding what people expect from the State Bar.

So the State Bar leadership has determined to formalize this process. We are hiring a professional facilitator to lead a series of discussions, some among the leadership and others with members, from a broad spectrum of practice areas, firm size, and activity level. It is our hope and belief that in this way the leadership can generate the kinds of

information and ideas that can make our association even better. During my tenure I have been impressed that both our leadership and our members who participate in our association are focused on our mission and are disciplined in their efforts to become the very best association we can be. We believe that in this way the Bar can play an essential role in

raising the standards of professional practice in our state, serving the practicing lawyers of this state more efficiently, and improving and enhancing the justice system in our state.

These various activities I have described are the first steps in an ongoing process to continually improve what we do for our members and the justice system by building

on our strong foundation of the past. It is important that our State Bar belong to every one of us. Whether you are active in leadership, serve on a committee, a section, or are not active at all, as a member of our noble profession, your viewpoint is valued, appreciated, and needed. In this way we can and will be even better. ♦