

# Go Spartans, Wolverines or Do You Care?



John T. Berry

Football is in the air. There is a sense of excitement for all those who love the anticipation of another year's competition between rivals whether it be Spartans, Wolverines, Irish, Buckeyes, Seminoles, or Gators. Then again, some could care less.

All those who do follow intercollegiate athletics know that there is no love lost when school rivals meet. We can speak of healthy competition or respected adversaries but to many, if not most, warfare is a more apt description.

So too with politics. Whether we talk of Republicans or Democrats, liberals or conservatives, it is a matter of intense, let us say, difference of opinions. Candidates and parties posture while closely observing "pre-season polls."

So what does all that have to do with the State Bar of Michigan? Plenty. As mentioned in recent articles we as a Bar are in the midst of sorting out our future.

An overriding consensus is emerging from all the input we are receiving from you. Political partisanship must be avoided in a unified bar. A unified bar, one which requires membership, must stick almost exclusively to programs and issues that unite us, not divide us. Whether we are Spartans or Wolverines and whatever our political leaning, there should

be a comfortable home in an organization with a goal of advancing lawyers' practices and the administration of justice.

That is easier said than done, but we must start with that goal clearly defined. Does that mean we will be a wimpy, stand-for-nothing organization? Of course not. Tough decisions will always face us with strong differences of opinion. As long as lawyers are involved, and for that matter as long as humans are involved, total objectivity is impossible.

What is attainable, however, is the establishment of a guiding principle to focus us on advancing the administration of justice. When we stray to partisan issues or politics, there will be an established standard by which we will be held accountable.

Ours is a profession in the middle of a whirlwind of outside and internal pressure to change. Some of that change is needed and some should be resisted. We've got plenty to do as a Bar in just helping you flourish in the midst of that change.

As your Bar decides on how to spend your dues dollars it is imperative to follow your advice and spend them on programs which help you to practice law more efficiently, competently, and professionally.

A special planning and advisory committee composed of a wide cross-section of our Bar met on August 15th and 16th. They reached similar conclusions. They unanimously said we should focus on programs directly helping lawyers in their day-to-day lives.

More specifically they said we must help lawyers with law office efficiency issues, technology, and we must help to maintain an economically and professionally healthy, vibrant profession. It is important to react quickly to pressures for changes in the legal profession and help lawyers adapt to those changes.

We at the Bar and we as lawyers are not wringing our hands at the thought of these tough challenges. In fact, this is what drew us to this profession—tough issues with the great opportunity to make a difference in their resolution.

The true test of our resolve comes, however, with our willingness to make very difficult programmatic changes and then to have

the willingness to pay the price to accomplish our goals. We must put our time, money, and resources to those things we say are vitally important to us.

Well, it is time now to kick off for another fall of great sports. It is my hope that this will be the best season yet both for your team and your Bar.

... On a personal note, my first year as your executive director could not have been blessed with a better president or board. Anyone who meets Tom Ryan notices first and foremost his infectious optimism and love for this profession. His main goal has been to be a consensus builder—not an easy task with this herd of cats called lawyers. His effort toward that goal has been tireless, relentless, and all-consuming. As a solo practitioner, he represents a work and life experience shared by many more lawyers than not.

What Tom Ryan showed to us all was that if we worked hard enough and cared hard enough, not only about the issues but the people we dealt with, we could unite and become an awesome Bar. I can't thank Tom enough for his part in allowing me to serve this Bar. Even more importantly I can't thank him and his wife Colleen enough for their graciousness and friendship given to my wife and myself. He has made my job fun even under the most intense of times. Tom Ryan's legacy is not a program. His legacy is the guiding principle of inclusiveness. That is his legacy and that is my desire for the future of this Bar. We owe you a lot, Tom Ryan, and we sincerely thank you for it. This one is for you—GO IRISH. ♦

## "Let's Talk":

### Breakfast with John Berry

Sept 13, 2001, 8:00–9:00 a.m.  
Annual Meeting, Governor's Room,  
Lansing Center, Lansing

Please join me as my guest for a continental breakfast and open discussion on Bar issues of your choice.

If you can't make it, please forward your thoughts or concerns to me at [voice@mail.michbar.org](mailto:voice@mail.michbar.org).