

By Naseem Stecker

CRANMER

the Communicator

71ST PRESIDENT IS A CONSENSUS

His obvious passion for the law, his reputation as an outstanding criminal defense attorney, and his ability to communicate what he knows in a way that is easily understood by the general public have all made Thomas W. Cranmer a media personality in his hometown, Detroit. It helps that he exudes confidence, has a great voice, is always impeccably dressed, and has Midwestern good looks. For the past 12 years, he has been a legal analyst for Channel 7 News in Detroit, functioning as the voice of the law, explaining the intricacies of high-profile cases like the Malice Green and O.J. Simpson cases to viewers at home.

As he takes over the reins of leadership at the Bar as the 71st president, Tom Cranmer plans on using his media savvy and communication skills to further unite SBM members. "I think we have wonderful resources, opportunities, and ways of helping our members be better lawyers. I'm not sure we've always done the best job of communicating those opportunities. I think that shortcoming, if there has been a shortcoming, falls not on the Bar staff but on the lawyer leaders of the Bar. I hope to energize our leaders and be the focal point of communication with our members."

Building consensus is central to his leadership style. "I'm not someone who tries to rule with an iron fist—that isn't my style. We have many outstanding people on the Board of Commissioners, Representative Assembly, and certainly the Bar staff. I view myself as a team member with the honor of being for the coming year, the leader of the team but still very much a team member and a team player."



Tom and his wife, Maria.

Tom Cranmer actually started his career as a prosecutor 30 years ago. He was with the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office for three years and the U.S. Attorney's Office for four, prior to going into private practice in 1982 joining the firm of Miro, Weiner and Kramer. Since early 2005, he has been a principal at Miller Canfield in Troy, practicing in the litigation and dispute resolution group.

A life-long Detroit area resident, he graduated from the University of Michigan in 1972 and went to law school at Ohio Northern University, where he received his Juris Doctor in 1975. Cranmer is married and has three children—a daughter who is 25 and is in a graduate psychology program at the University of Denver, and two sons aged 18 and 16. One of the joys of his life he says was coaching Little League baseball as his sons Taylor and Chase were growing up.

Another passion is charitable work. Together with his good friend Dan Malone from Butzel Long in Detroit, Cranmer serves on the board of The Generation of Promise, an organization dedicated to exploring diver-

sity and building future leaders among high school students. His interest in molding the younger generation has also led him to focus on teaching. He teaches for one of the preeminent trial advocacy programs in the United States, The National Institute for Trial Advocacy, and is co-author of a legal treatise, *Michigan Civil Trials and Evidence*, published by West.

Described as a "steadfast volunteer" by Lisa Stadig-Elliott, executive director of the Oakland County Bar Association, Cranmer had been instrumental in setting up the Inns of Court program there to train new attorneys in the best courtroom practices and to infuse collegiality and professionalism from the very start. "He is the first person to volunteer to help, when he probably has the least amount of time," Stadig-Elliott said.

"We all marvel as to where he can find the time to do it all," observed Joseph Papelian, an attorney with the Delphi Corporation in Troy. "I always accuse him of being cloned. There has to be two of him to be able to complete everything that he does!" Papelian has known him for 28 years. Friendships that have lasted and keeping in touch with such friends is very important to Cranmer, who often combines his love of sports—basketball, tennis, softball, golf, and fly fishing—with socializing. Excerpts from a recent interview with Tom Cranmer follow:

What do you think our members should know about you?

I am very interested in helping our members learn more about the State Bar. I'm also interested in learning from our members how the State Bar can be more relevant and

helpful to them in their everyday practice. I want to be the kind of president who rolls up his sleeves and hopefully does something to help all of our members in their day-to-day practice. I think that one of the things I can do to be helpful is to communicate the message about just how hardworking our Bar staff is and the opportunities that are there

BUILDER

for our members. I want to bring the message of what it is the State Bar is doing to as many members as possible because I'm extremely proud of what the State Bar has accomplished. But equally important, I want to be a listener. I think many of us have discovered that we often learn more by listening than by talking. I'm very interested in getting feedback from the members as to the concerns they have—ways they think the State Bar can be more helpful. I want to be as much a listener as I do a communicator.

Do you have any specific goals for your presidency?

As you know, we have gotten away from the notion of presidential agendas and have focused on the strategic plan that the Board of Commissioners adopted and recently revised. Furthering the goals of the strategic plan and communicating to our members exactly what the State Bar is doing for them is my number one priority. Additionally, I want to continue to emphasize the importance of the Access to Justice program and try to improve the image of lawyers in the community.

There are more and more stories about the law and there's a need for lawyers to be spokespeople. You've been doing this for a while. Do you have any advice for other lawyers from the benefit of your own experience?

First and foremost, lawyers should view the media as a potentially friendly resource as opposed to being an adversary. When you have a case that involves some media exposure, I think the first question you have to ask yourself is "Will I be able to further my

What they're saying:

Beyond his professionalism and his outstanding competence as a lawyer, the first word that comes to mind is class. Tom is a first-class guy. He's a person you can always rely upon to be honest and truthful. He has great integrity and a passion for the law. But, more than that, he's a good person. [If he has a fault] he's too nice of a guy. I think he'd have a hard time being a judge!

Hon. Gerald E. Rosen
U.S. District Court, Detroit

He is not only a man of integrity, he is very loyal and he has a good sense of getting through issues in a quick manner and finding common ground. That's what in part makes him such a good lawyer—that he is able to get through all the minutia and get to the heart of the matter. He is very well respected, not only by the judges but by counsel.

Joseph E. Papelian
Delphi Corp., Troy

I would describe Tom as a humble superstar. He possesses so many qualities that we look for in not only a leader but in a friend and a fellow human being. He is extraordinarily gifted as a practicing attorney, but he also very unselfishly gives back not only to his profession but also to our community. For those who haven't had the privilege of knowing him, Tom is very approachable and I would encourage fellow members of our Bar who have not met him yet to take the opportunity to do so, because not only will Tom welcome that but, he will listen.

Daniel Malone
Butzel Long, Detroit

He's very well measured, thoughtful, more of a quiet leader. When he voices his opinion, it is something that everyone listens to. He has a great deal of quiet influence and is very respected....If you're in a pinch and you need some help, you know he's the one you can turn to. He is the epitome of a great attorney and role model for our new people.

Lisa Stadig-Elliott
Executive Director, Oakland County Bar Association

client's interest by talking to the media?" Generally speaking, I think lawyers can be effective in promoting their client's interest by communicating with the media the important aspects of the client's case. That to me means being honest and straightforward. It doesn't mean that you answer all of the media's questions all of the time because sometimes you simply can't do that for a variety of reasons. It is often important to the client's psychological well-being to get his or her side of the story out. The mere fact that you don't speak to the media doesn't mean that the story is not going to be publicized or that it isn't going to be written. Generally, the story is going to be written; it's a question of whether or not you're going to have some input into the story that will be helpful to your client's position. In addition, of course,

lawyers always have to be mindful of their ethical obligations set forth in the Rules of Professional Conduct, in particular, Rule 3.6, when speaking to the media.

You've written a book about evidence and you teach a class at Cooley Law School. You write, practice law and you teach—comment on that?

I am very interested in teaching trial advocacy and litigation techniques. I've done that for about 15 years. I've recently had the opportunity of teaching evidence at Cooley Law School. It was an opportunity that presented itself through a good friend of mine, Judge Gerald Rosen. Judge Rosen and I team-taught an Evidence class this past summer. The students were very bright and eager to learn. It has helped me as a lawyer because

I had to go back and re-learn some things I had frankly forgotten from my days in law school. It was an educational process for both me and the students and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Can you comment on some of the memorable cases that you have worked on?

As a young federal prosecutor, I was involved in a very high-profile case involving allegations of corruption in a local police department. That case was a great education for me because I was supposed to try the case with a more senior lawyer. Unfortunately, early on in the course of the six-to-eight-week trial, the senior lawyer's father became very ill and he wasn't able to continue with the trial. Thus, I was left having to try the case myself against six very experienced, very well-known criminal defense lawyers. That proved to be a wonderful learning experience for me. I also handled the defense of the case against former Detroit Police Chief William Hart. At the time, it was a very celebrated high-profile case that lasted for three or four months in federal court.

More generally, what issues are criminal defense lawyers concerned with?

I think criminal defense lawyers are always concerned with media reports about a defendant's case being dismissed "on a technicality." The protection of an individual's civil liberties and constitutional rights should never be viewed as a mere technicality. On a different note, I believe one of the most important issues we face today concerning our criminal justice system is the issue of adequate pay for criminal defense lawyers representing indigent defendants. That has been and continues to be a very serious problem. The latest statistics that I have seen suggest that Michigan ranks 49th out of 50 states with regard to the average fee paid to criminal defense lawyers taking indigent cases. That to me is an alarming statistic. While I certainly recognize that as a state we have some very serious fiscal issues, I nevertheless believe that the issue of payment of indigent criminal defense lawyers is a very significant one that needs to be addressed. It is certainly an issue that I intend to speak about in the coming year.



Left to right: older son Taylor, daughter Jackie, who graduated from the University of Michigan, younger son Chase, and Tom Cranmer.

You deal with so much corruption and malfeasance and with people accused of this. Over time, does this color your view of how you look at people?

The answer to that is no. I have represented hundreds of defendants in my career and I can honestly say that there are only a handful that I would tell you that I didn't like and enjoy as people. The people that I tend to represent as criminal defendants are almost invariably individuals who have no prior criminal record. The crimes that they commit are often totally out of character with the rest of their lives. For most criminal cases, the initial question is whether or not the person is guilty of the offense charged and importantly, whether the government can prove its case beyond a reasonable doubt. If the defendant is guilty, the issue then becomes what is the appropriate punishment for the offense? That's where I think more often than not, I can have a helpful and positive impact. A critical part of my job is to help the court see the defendant as an individual and hopefully convince the court to fashion a sentence that is just and appropriate. All of us are human and at times we stumble. It's when people stumble that they often find their way into my office. It's very gratifying to help someone, set them back on the right course, and be able to say that a single misstep hasn't destroyed the balance of the person's life and career.

What's the status of the Bar's strategic plan?

I point to this with some pride. A number of years ago, the Board of Commissioners adopted a strategic plan, which we recently revisited and refined. It is not only important for the Bar to have a strategic plan, but it is also important for the Bar to examine the plan periodically and ask itself what goals have already been accomplished? What goals need to be revisited, and how do we move ahead? I'm proud that we have done a good job to date of accomplishing many of the goals in the plan. Services like the *e-Journal*, Michigan Law Online, and the Public Policy Resource Center are terrific accomplishments that can supplement every lawyer's practice. Some additional goals of the plan are a topic that I will be discussing in detail in the coming months, so stay tuned!

What do you hear from our members? Do you get feedback from people?

I get feedback from people and the feedback I receive is generally very positive. Nevertheless, I would like to receive even more feedback. Candidly, I think the more our members know about the State Bar, the prouder they will be of the Bar. Nevertheless, whether our members think we are doing a good job, a mediocre job or a poor job, I'd like to know. Throughout my year as president, I hope our members will contact me with their concerns and feedback. ♦

Naseem Stecker is a staff writer for the Michigan Bar Journal. She can be contacted by e-mail at nstecker@mail.michbar.org.