

TWO MINUTES

LAW MAN

Commercial litigator
John McEntee
takes over the Nassau Bar



Photo by Bob Gigliano

John McEntee, a commercial litigation partner at Uniondale-based law firm Farrell Fritz, was installed Tuesday as the new president of the Nassau County Bar Association. Among the new boss' priorities: safeguarding the mental and physical health of the bar's roughly 5,000 members and constructing a new Family Court facility in Mineola.

Now that you've taken the helm of the NCBA, what will you focus on? We have a lawyer-assistance program that provides support and counseling to attorneys facing emotional, physical and mental challenges. Lawyers suffer depression at the rate of almost four times the general population and suicide rates almost twice the rate of the general population.

Why is that? We know people come to lawyers in times of crisis – the breakup of a marriage, bankruptcy, personal injury. It seems in accepting the problems and attempting to resolve the burdens facing others, we create our own problems.

What can you do? I'm going to work to enhance the program so lawyers have a place they can turn to for counseling and assistance. It's all confidential and can help with lots of things: substance abuse, depression, even going through cancer treatments.

What trends do you see in commercial litigation? The biggest change has been the enormous cost associated with electronic discovery. Even in a relatively small lawsuit, you can spend enormous amounts of

money collecting and processing electronic data. It used to be that people would just copy files and faxes – now you're searching all sorts of computers for information.

Who really profits financially from this? On cases where you have a lot of documents to be reviewed, firms are using contract attorneys at a substantially lower rate. Clients don't want to pay full law firm prices. Vendors will supply lawyers working eight hours a day to review documents, and their rates are substantially lower. They're typically recent law school graduates. Some it is done offshore, too.

Is law school changing? It's much more focused on getting lawyers ready to practice on Day One. In law school, we never examined a single contract. It was all theory. Now lawyers are being better prepared to hit the ground running.

As a trial lawyer, what do you do differently than in the past? I think nowadays, there's more of an emphasis on demonstrative evidence: charts, photos, things jurors can see. Trying to give the jurors visuals to supplement the evidence placed in front of them. You have 100 emails and 10 contracts in

evidence, and you want to put that in a story. Now you have PowerPoint presentations during opening and closing arguments; that never happened 25 years ago.

What is the bar doing about lingering legal needs associated with Hurricane Sandy? There are many Sandy-related needs. There are over 1,000 pending Sandy cases in federal court. Some of these people have lawyers, some don't. Many people still aren't living in their houses or are having issues with insurance companies. We're still having clinics. We thought we'd have folded shop six months ago, because there's a continuing need.

How are plans proceeding for a new Family Court building in Nassau? We're trying to open a new building in Mineola to replace the dilapidated building in Westbury. It's bursting at the seams. We're working with the Office of Court Administration to make that a reality. My understanding is the country is waiting for Nassau Interim Finance Authority approval to begin construction. The plan is to convert the old social services building in Mineola. That's going to be a priority.

– CLAUDE SOLNIK