

Nassau Lawyer

MAY 2015 | VOL. 64 | NO. 9 | WWW.NASSAUBAR.ORG

SOME PARTING THOUGHTS

Every year, the American Bar Association hosts a three-day “Bar Leader” conference in Chicago for incoming presidents of state and county bar associations, offering a variety of presentations on bar-related topics. When I received my invitation last year I assumed the conference would be of limited value, but who could turn down a trip to the Windy City in early March?

Three presentations deserve mention. The first was “Writing Your President’s Column.” I didn’t see the immediate value of the presentation, but the alternative for that time slot was a workshop on stress management through meditation and introspection. Not being a big fan of meditation and having spent my career carefully avoiding introspection, I opted for the writing workshop. The presenter began with a rather deflating observation for all of the gathered would-be presidents, which is that few people actually read the president’s column. At best, he said, you might get a quick scan. The presenter noted that president’s columns typically focus on recent events at the association, a topic of limited interest to many readers, and suggested focusing instead on topics of more general interest. I took that advice, perhaps to the puzzlement of some, and learned a few things along the way.

The second presentation was on social media. The speakers emphasized the growing importance of social media, and urged attendees to connect with their members through Facebook and Twitter. I was told my association’s members wanted to know what I was thinking and doing, which struck me as rather unlikely, and that by establishing a presence on Facebook and Twitter during my term as President I would position myself as a “thought leader.” Despite the speakers’ enthusiasm I wasn’t persuaded this was a good idea. Some of my reluctance was borne of humility, for on the few occasions I would be doing something of mild importance I thought it would be immodest or imprudent to broadcast it. Most of my reluctance, though, was borne of fear. I was con-

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cerned with the conclusions the membership might draw upon learning my typical lunch routine did not involve discussions of important legal matters with movers and shakers at notable restaurants but rather eating a sandwich from the RXR Plaza cafeteria at my desk while wrestling with difficult decisions regarding my overdue time sheets (did I spend one-tenth of an hour on that call or was it two?).

The third presentation was on bar association finances. I was particularly interested in this program. And I was not alone, as it drew a standing-room-only crowd. With the drastic drop in law school enrollments, I and many others were concerned about how the reduced flow of newly-admitted lawyers would affect bar association finances. The central theme of the presentation was that the drop in law school enrollment was not temporary, and that bar associations needed to take steps now to position



FROM THE PRESIDENT

John P. McEntee

themselves for declining membership rolls.

Aside from these concerns common to all bar associations, I knew when I became President that our Association had a more immediate concern, that our home, Domus, needed significant repairs and lacked the money to pay for them. As a result, in my first week as President I asked the Board of Directors to raise dues. Soon thereafter, I effected a reduction in Association staffing.

I know some members of the Association thought these were bad decisions—that point was made clear to me on a number of occasions. But, I saw no alternative. Combined, they will generate the cash flow required for the monthly installments on the \$1,500,000 mortgage loan the Association is taking to make repairs in a like amount. And yet, more work on Domus must be done, for in the next five years or so the Association must make an additional \$750,000 in repairs, including the refurbishment and replacement of windows and HVAC equipment. Although raising the money for these repairs will be a challenge for the Executive Committee and the Board of Directors during the next few years, I am confident they are prepared to meet this challenge.

Several of our members received well-deserved recognition this year. The Hon. Peter Skelos received the President’s Award for his leadership in fashioning a solution to lost funding for one of the most important programs of the Association, the Lawyers Assistance Program. Director’s Award winner Rosalia Baiamonte did an outstanding job leading the Judiciary Committee in performing its critical role of evaluating the suitability of prospective candidates for judicial office. Jon Michael Probststein received the Thomas Maligno Pro Bono Attorney of the Year Award for his exemplary work providing pro bono legal services to the indigent in our community. And, Past President Peter H. Levy, the Co-Chair of the We Care Fund, is a deserving recipient of the Frank J. Santagata Past President Award, as there is no member of the Association who is more universally respected or dedicated to the Association.

I conclude with a few expressions of gratitude.

First, I was fortunate to have the support of a dedicated Executive Committee, comprising President-Elect Steve Eisman, First Vice President Martha Krisel, Second Vice President Steve Leventhal, Treasurer Elena Karabatos, Secretary Rick Collins, and Immediate Past President Peter Mancuso. Each is a talented, hard-working lawyer committed to the Association, and collectively were a tremendous source of wisdom and guidance throughout the year.

Second, I am grateful to Keith Soressi for his dedication and good work as Executive Director. He was in the difficult position of replacing an icon at the Association, the beloved Deena Ehrlich, and has done so ably.

Third, I am grateful to the staff of the Association. Each year the staff is asked to do more with fewer resources, and it does so terrifically and without complaint. When you need to schedule a committee meeting, a clinic, or a CLE program, or need to organize an event, the staff works behind the scenes to ensure everything goes smoothly.

Fourth, I am grateful to my partners and colleagues at Farrell Fritz. I am fortunate to work with such a wonderful and talented group of lawyers and staff who challenge me every day to be a better person and a better lawyer. I couldn’t think of a better place to practice law.

Finally, I close my last President’s Column the way I closed my first, by thanking the membership for the privilege of serving as the 112th President of the Nassau County Bar Association. I will be forever grateful for this honor.