

As Seen In

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T W O M I N U T E S



Setting a high bar

Ilene Cooper
has an ambitious agenda

Ilene Cooper isn't shy and she doesn't mind bragging about her accomplishments. Now, she can add president of the Suffolk County Bar Association to her lengthy resume. The partner at Farrell Fritz became the third female president in the 101-year history of the bar association this summer, and with that title, she plans on helping a lot of the struggling attorneys on the East End of Long Island.

What are your goals as the Suffolk County Bar president? I have created new committees that are really designed for what's being confronted by the lawyers in Suffolk County right now because of the difficult economic times.

Most of the law firms in Suffolk are single and small practitioners. A lot of them are concentrated in real estate. Many firms and attorneys are faltering dramatically. We are really reaching out to them.

What can you do to help them? I have formed a community outreach committee. Its purpose is to provide our membership with networking opportunities and referral opportunities with business events, non-profit events and community service opportunities that they can attend and potentially meet new people for business purposes.

I am fortunate because I work for a very large firm, and those opportunities come to me through our marketing department. Most attorneys in Suffolk County do not have the same opportunities.

This committee will have a calendar of events in The Suffolk Lawyer on a monthly basis. We will provide information on events or communities in need or non-profit organizations. And we will also have a Web page dedicated to that purpose as well.

In addition, our membership benefits committee will help attorneys find ways to afford benefits such as health insurance and malpractice insurance.

We are trying to be sensitive to the economics of our constituents.

I am also having two membership cocktail parties because Suffolk County is so large. I'm having one on the East End in September and the second one I'm having at Blackstone Steak House on Oct. 26. Those events are free to our members. They are designed as opportunities to meet and greet and hopefully lift their spirits a bit and meet their colleagues.

I am also working on a committee to enhance our Web site to provide more information and readily accessible information to our membership.

Last, but not least, we have established a diversity committee that will be up and running by September. We have a very diverse population in Suffolk County and a very diverse legal population. Our bar association is not exclusive, and we do not want it to be exclusive. All of our members have needs that need to be addressed and the bar's goals and perspectives can only be enhanced by helping and addressing all of them. That is the mission of the diversity committee.

It sounds like you have a lot on your plate. I feel very strongly about this bar association and what I want to do with its members. Many of them feel lost at sea to a certain extent. We want them to feel like the bar association is a utility and a benefit to enhance their professional life. The bar associations

throughout New York state should all have that as their goal.

How did you become so interested in the bar association and these issues?

When I got out of law school, my first job was in Nassau County and I knew nothing about the Suffolk Bar Association.

I spent three years in Nassau and then went to the Surrogate Court in Suffolk County and became familiar with a lot of attorneys in that practice area there. Many were involved in the bar association. I went to a couple meetings and found that the bar association was a wonderful place to meet people when I left the courts system.

My first involvement with the bar association was with the Academy of Law. I became very involved in doing multiple events and got some very significant speakers to come to the bar association. Mario Cuomo, Anita Hill, Gloria Steinem. All of the events that I ran through the Academy of Law energized me a lot. And it brought a tremendous benefit to the association. It inspired me to do more and better things.

I even had Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor come to a luncheon at the bar. She came to the association about four years ago. And she said she came because I was so persistent. She wanted to see who kept writing her and calling her. She was terrific. I became very inspired to do bigger and better things.

– MICHAEL H. SAMUELS