

## REPORT FROM YOUR BAR-TENDER

### It Has Been an Active Six Months

We are constantly striving to make the Berks County Bar Association relevant to our members and to the community. The last six months was no exception.

Since the 2015 Annual Meeting, six months ago, we have had a very successful Bench-Bar Retreat at Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic in early November. Many thanks to those who attended and we appreciate the work of Vice President Joan London, Walt Diener and Abe Cepeda in planning and executing the CLE sessions. All reports indicated that it was a fun-filled collegial time.

For three weeks in November I taught a course in Alvernia's Seniors College entitled "Church and State: How Solid is the Wall of Separation." During the first class member David Crossett and I debated the reasoning behind the decision of *Obergefell v. Hodges*. As community outreach for the Bar Association, it was a fun encounter! The class received extensive coverage in the *Reading Eagle*. On Thursday, April 21, I am to receive the Saint Bonaventure Award for high distinction in teaching. The honor is very nice for my volunteer work, but the positive participation by the senior citizens is reward enough.

The Admission Ceremony was on November 12 and featured admittees Mari Andracchio, Sarah Hart, Jennifer McAteer, Karissa Rodriguez and Alexander Yatron. As it turned out, the ceremony was the last one to be planned by Carmen Stanziola, who did a fine job for many years. Thank you, Carmen. The new chair is Alisa Hobart, and we are confident she will carry on the great tradition.

Finally, November closed with my attending the semi-annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Association of Bar Executives. I had been elected treasurer a year before, but due to a resignation I was asked to also take on the secretarial duties for 2016. Then, my silly colleagues felt that I should not miss out on being president. So, in light of my retirement planned for the end of 2018, the nominating committee shuffled the deck and nominated me to be president in the years 2017 and 2018. It is a feather in my hat that I did not seek, nor require. However, I feel blessed to have colleagues who apparently think so highly of me, misguided though they may be, that I need to serve as their president.

The holiday season kicked off in December with the Law Foundation's Holiday Benefit Luncheon, co-sponsored with the Pennsylvania Institute of Certified Public Accountants, Reading Chapter. Year in and year out, as chaired by Law Foundation Trustee Mark Caltagironi, it is a very entertaining event. I must confess, however, it is better attended by bankers and accountants than attorneys. Since the event benefits the bar's charitable arm, I urge more BCBA members to make it a part of their holiday celebration.

I cannot whine about the attendance for the event held a week later—our Holiday Reception. In honor of our 2016 President Jill Gehman Koestel, who enjoys taking cruises, the event was held on a “Cruise Ship” anchored in the social hall of the Synagogue in Wyomissing Hills. We are blessed to have Bravo for Rose as our caterer; Rose, Joe and their staff pour their hearts and souls into our events. Good fellowship results.

As 2015 and a CLE reporting period were coming to an end, we reached out to those desperate for credits with an innovative CLE offering. Called “CLE Marathon” we offered, on December 29, six video replays of selected luncheon seminars. Using new technology, our Communications Manager Paula Ziegler is able to record certain seminars, save them on the cloud and then replay them. The December innovation proved popular with the procrastinators. The next “CLE Marathon” is set for April 26.

With the start of the new year, Jill began her presidential duties by welcoming three new judges to the bench. It was a big day! Later in the month she hosted a luncheon for the chairs of our sections and committees. It was a room full. The luncheon is our way of showing appreciation for the volunteers who perform so much work on behalf of the Bar Association. In particular, I want to applaud the strong leadership we are seeing in some of our sections. They provide a forum for an exchange of ideas and serve to increase the members’ legal knowledge. I am excited about the two new sections—Criminal Defense and Minor Judiciary Practice and Procedure. They are each off to a great start.

The 2016 edition of the Legal Spirits Happy Hour in February was a bigger hoot than usual. This year’s theme was “Superheroes” and some members came dressed as super figures. Over 70 members enjoyed the food, beverage and hanging out with super people, whether in costume or not, in the Batdorf Room and Kittrell Suite.

Bringing February to a conclusion was the Conference of County Bar Leaders in State College. Berks attendees were Queen Koestel, and Vice President Joan London. Also, our own Past Presidents Terry Weiler and Jill Scheidt participated as members of the CCBL Executive Committee. Past President Scheidt and I were on a panel discussing several of our unique programs. We received a County Bar Recognition Award for the series of workshops in the Latino community planned by our Community Outreach Coordinator Rainy Leonor-Lake on worker rights, domestic violence, immigration law and foster parents.

The month of March is likewise a busy time. It began with President Koestel and our Board of Directors hosting a dinner for the Common Pleas Judges, an event that exemplifies the very good relationship our bar enjoys with the Judges. On Friday of that week we then hosted a Roundtable with Congressman Ryan Costello. He engaged in a meaningful dialogue with a good turnout of members. The next week we had the annual Batdorf Lecture at Alvernia University, featuring the topic “Juvenile Justice.” Moderated by President Koestel, the panel members were Judge Scott Lash, an attorney from the Juvenile Education Center in Philadelphia and a former juvenile detainee. A good

discussion took place. The March Madness Party was held on St. Patrick's Day with more than 40 members stopping by to watch games throughout the day while enjoying food, beverage and fellowship.

Unfortunately, President-Elect Kurt Althouse, Vice President London and I missed the March Madness Party because we were in Chicago for the ABA's Bar Leadership Institute. It is good training for our leaders in line for the presidency, but this year a particular concern was online legal services. We attended a session with the ABA's Executive Director to discuss the ABA's limited pilot program with Rocket Lawyer intending to connect small business owners with attorneys from October 1 to January 10. PA was one of the three pilot states. He reported there were 10,000 hits on the website but only 124 posed a question and only 46 posed a second question (Only 15% were from PA). No attorney-client relationships resulted. He referred to it as a "hotline service" and not a lawyer-referral service. He did not rule out future collaborations with Rocket Lawyer or even LegalZoom or Google. At our March Board of Directors' meeting this issue was discussed. The Board's consensus continues to be to oppose any partnership by the ABA with any of these online services. Such collaboration only promotes and sanctions what is not the true practice of law.

April then began with the Jazz Fest Dinner and Concert. Another sell-out, it is the only event, other than the Retreat, that includes significant others. It is a good time.

A few days later we again sponsored the Lecture in Contemporary Legal Issues at Albright College. This year's speaker was Caroline Fredrickson, who spoke on her book "Under the Bus: Working Women are Being Rolled Over." About 100 people attended the lecture on campus. The following morning, she and I continued the conversation on Mike Faust's Feedback show on WEEU radio. He is very good at moderating, and the exposure it provides the BCBA is very valuable.

We remembered the life and celebrated the career of Alan Miller on April 8. Ned Ehrlich eulogized his close friend with moving, articulate remarks. Two law school classmates of Alan actually came from York and Pittsburgh to share their remembrance. It was a very nice Memorial Service for which we give great thanks to the Bench for hosting.

The second Tuesday of April is "Be Kind to Lawyer Day." While it has not yet achieved Hallmark card status, it is not an event I dreamed up, as some have claimed. Just Google it! We offered a continental breakfast for our members on April 12, and about twenty took advantage of having kindness bestowed upon them. Watch for it next year.

On April 14 our outreach to the Latino community continued when our Board hosted a reception for the board members of the Latino Chamber of Commerce. Networking events such as this will, hopefully, create opportunities to build trust in the Latino community that is so badly needed if we are to convince Hispanics to retain attorneys and not pay notary publics to handle their legal needs.

Despite all of the events in March and April, the staff's focus has largely been on the 2016 Bench-Bar Conference. With a registration of over 260 members, 42 presenters, 14 vendors and 17 seminars, a lot of staff effort is required. By the time you read this, assuming that anyone does, the Conference will be history, and we hope you feel the effort was worth it.

We have no time to rest because the month of May promises to be busy as it begins with the Law Day Luncheon on May 3. Please plan to join in celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of *Miranda v. Arizona*. And don't forget Book 'Em! During the week of May 23 to 27 members will again be reading to Reading's pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students. If you have not already signed up to read, please contact Karen Loeper of our staff. There is no other bar event that feels more rewarding than this one. You do not want to miss out.

A review of just the last half year demonstrates how many events are planned and executed, not to mention the luncheon CLEs, as well as the committee and section meetings. To help with planning and scheduling such programming, we have hired Britt Kobularcik to take on event coordinating duties together with her bookkeeping responsibilities. She joins a staff that is working hard to make a difference in your practice.

As we look back on the past six months, I hope you feel that your Bar Association is fulfilling its mission that includes "promoting professional excellence, encouraging collegiality and exercising advocacy on its behalf."

While my retirement is set for the end of 2018, I am not in a retiring mood. I look forward to the next six months. Serving as your "Bar-Tender" is a privilege. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Donald F. Smith, Jr.  
Executive Director