

Now More Than Ever

by Kurt E. Schnelz
President, OCBA



The year was 1934 and Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the president of the United States. It had been five years since the crash of 1929 and the country was experiencing its worst economic crisis ever. There were millions out of work; there were bread lines, tent cities and dust bowls in every state. The country was on its knees. Does any of this sound familiar?

When I made my remarks at the OCBA Annual Meeting on June 3, 2009, I posed two questions to the audience. The first question I asked was, "How many of you are worried about our economy?" I asked the audience to raise their hands and, to the last person, they all raised their hands.

We are all worried about how long and how bad it will get before this economic crisis is over and, given our history, we know it will be over sometime – just not when. The United States is far too great a nation not to get back on its feet again. However, these are scary times and, to paraphrase President Abraham Lincoln, "times that do indeed try men and women's souls."

Many of us in our lifetime have lived through recessions and large downturns in the economy, but candidly, this is the first time since the Great Depression that we in the legal profession have really felt the pinch and the squeeze of a financial nightmare. Imagine a year ago thinking that the large firms would be laying off attorneys in great numbers; that the state and local governments would be slashing jobs – including legal jobs, placing a freeze on hiring and cutting public services; that the law school graduates would be unable to find jobs and leave the state in great numbers (studies show that up to 80 percent of all law school graduates leave the state); that Chrysler and General Motors would be in bankruptcy; and that the president of the United States would discharge the president of General Motors – at one time the largest industrial corporation in the world. Not one of us would have ever thought we would be where we are today.

The second question I asked was, "How many of you think that joining a bar association is a positive thing to do in times like these?" Again, to the last person, everyone raised their hands. I asked that question because it is interesting to note that this year marks the 75th year anniversary of the Oakland County Bar Association. That means this bar association was formed in 1934, five years after the

crash of 1929 and near the bottom of the Great Depression. And what did the attorneys in Oakland County do at that time, who, candidly, were probably more scared than we are now? They said, "We need each other. We must band together and work as a team for our profession and for the public." They clearly understood and appreciated the famous Benjamin Franklin quote, "We must all hang together or we will hang separately."

What is even more interesting is that the State Bar of Michigan was formed the very next year, in 1935 – the absolute pit of the Great Depression. The lawyers of that time, who had suffered for six years, understood the need and necessity to stand together. It may be an old cliché, but it's absolutely and completely true right now: In unity, there is strength. When we consider the growth of the Oakland County Bar Association, the programs that have been established and consistently maintained, the public service commitment that we have made and lived up to, the challenges that have been met and overcome and the respect we have earned as a profession, it was and is a success and the right thing to do at the right time, those 75 years ago. Now it is again the right time to stand together, to work together and, yes, to help not only each other but all those who require our skills to protect them and their families.

Since 1934, this bar association has lived through World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, 9-11, the Gulf War, Afghanistan, the Civil Rights Movement, numerous social and political events, and a whole host of economic ups and downs. We have also lived through landmark decisions of the United States Supreme Court that have forever changed not only the legal landscape of the land, but the social landscape as well.

At the forefront of all these events were lawyers. Lawyers were there to provide professional leadership and guidance, to hold the steady course. That leadership and guidance role has not dissipated or changed in the last 75 years and is as strong today as it ever was. Without a doubt, the leaders in our society will continue to look to the legal profession to solve their problems and provide future solutions; lawyers truly are the fiber that binds our society together. With all of us working and participating, the OCBA will be around for at least another 75 years – grow-

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President's Page

ing, improving, and serving its members and the public. We do need each other.

A voluntary organization is only as good as the commitment of its membership, and now more than ever, we need the commitment of our membership. It is important that each of you become involved in one of the approximately 21 committees we have at the bar and that you participate in bar events, which provide an opportunity to associate with like-minded people, not only to improve oneself professionally, but also to develop friendships that promote civility in the profession and betterment of the bar.

As your president, it is my hope, intention and desire to leave the bar in better shape than when I took office, to be a good financial steward, to provide leadership for our members, to develop a new strategic plan, to provide a good network for our members to have social fellowship and the professional contacts, to involve more of our members in the activities of the bar, to maintain a close and continuing relationship with the bench, to help lawyers at their desks with services and education programs and, most importantly, to make sure that we enjoy what we are doing together while we are doing it.

I look forward to this year, banding together for the betterment of our profession and being part of an organization that is needed now more than ever.

Calendar

Call the OCBA at (248) 334-3400 or visit www.ocba.org under Calendar of Events for information on the following events. All events (unless otherwise indicated) take place at the Oakland County Bar Center in Bloomfield Hills.

AUGUST

- 13 **"Alternatives to Termination of Parental Rights" – William Bartlam, Esq.**
Juvenile Law Committee Brown Bag Lunch Lecture Series
- 18 **"Criminal Convictions and Immigration" – Ronald E. Kaplovitz, Esq.**
Criminal Law Committee Brown Bag Lunch Lecture Series
- 18 **New Chair and Vice Chair Orientation**
OCBA 2009-2010 Committees

SEPTEMBER

- 15 **"Cross-Examining the Child Witness" – Jerome Sabbota, Esq.**
Criminal Law Committee Brown Bag Lunch Lecture Series
- 21 **OCBA Sustaining Member Recognition Event**
Skyline Club, Southfield – By Invitation Only
- 26 **OCBA's "Monkeying Around at the Zoo" Outing**
Detroit Zoo, Royal Oak

OCTOBER

- 8 **"State of the Law" – Ryan J. Deel, Esq.**
Juvenile Law Committee Brown Bag Lunch Lecture Series
- 20 **"Polygraph Examinations" – H. John Wojnarowski**
Criminal Law Committee Brown Bag Lunch Lecture Series
- 28 **Oakland County Bar Revue Talent Show**
Birmingham Community House

NOVEMBER

- 6 **Diversity Summit**
Thomas M. Cooley Law School, Auburn Hills Campus
- 17 **"Confessions and Admissions" – Joseph A. Lavigne, Esq.**
Criminal Law Committee Brown Bag Lunch Lecture Series

DECEMBER

- 3 **Holiday Gala**
Birmingham Country Club

Next month in LACHES:
Healthcare Issue