

In Memoriam

Christine A. Brunswick

Rarely does one person have an impact on an institution that can be clearly seen and felt. The Tax Section has clearly seen and felt the impact of Chris Brunswick on the institution. Chris passed away on February 25, 2013, after serving 27 years as the Section's Executive Director.

During those 27 years, a lot of Chairs of the Section came and went, but Chris was the constant that gave stability and comfort. She was always there when needed. She was the reservoir of all institutional knowledge of the Section, seemingly having the ability to remember every project the Section had undertaken and why it worked or why it failed.

For an institution to succeed and provide value, its tone must be set at the top. Chris helped set that tone. She practiced decency, cordiality, and honesty in how she dealt with Section leadership, Section members, and the Section staff. These attributes are evident in the staff that Chris assembled. The needs of the Section have been met professionally, energetically, and without complaint. Chris led by example, always pitching in if the Section was short-handed and not letting things slip just because the Section was temporarily short a staff member.

Over the years, the interests of the Section have not always aligned with those of the larger ABA. In fact, there have been times when the interests of the larger ABA have been directly counter to what was best for the Section. In each of those instances, Chris whole-heartedly advocated for the Section even if that meant taking positions opposed to those of her superiors in the ABA. Those positions were always taken with integrity, knowledge, and fairness. The Section prevailed in many of those matters because of Chris, and in those matters where the Section did not prevail, the Section benefitted from her willingness to do battle with the ABA. The Section's reputation within the ABA as an independent innovator is due in large part to Chris.

Chris was also innovative and resourceful. The Tax Section was one of the first sections to obtain a corporate sponsor. This met with significant resistance from the ABA management and required the Section to appeal to the Board of Governors. Ultimately the Section prevailed and the existence of a corporate sponsor played a significant part in building the reserves that give the Section financial stability. When our initial corporate sponsor failed to renew, Chris acted quickly, and a new sponsor was found in short order.

Chris was a strong proponent of advancing pro bono and public service efforts. The Tax Section has led the way in creating innovative approaches and committing significant resources, largely due to Chris's consistent advocacy and leadership. Among many initiatives over the years, in 2008 the Tax Section created a Pro Bono Counsel staff position to place greater focus on pro bono tax practice and to coordinate opportunities for members to get involved. In 2009, the Tax Section established a Public Service Fellowship,

which supports two fellows each year in undertaking a tax-specific public service project for a two-year term. Ten fellowships have been awarded since the project's inception. In this, as in other areas, Chris was the heart and soul of the Section.

Chris was forward-thinking and never lost sight of the big picture. She would not make a decision on a whim, but rather she took a practical, careful approach to solving problems and implementing solutions that could stand the test of time—whether it was to the next meeting, the next project, or to improve the way the Section had done things in the past. She had an uncanny ability to anticipate what you were thinking and had her own way of letting you know whether your idea was workable or not. She knew when to push, when to cajole, and when to tell you when you were wrong.

On a personal note, the last time I saw Chris was July 21, 2012, when she left in the middle of dinner because she was “not feeling well.” We talked a number of times after that, particularly in planning for the Joint Fall Meeting in Boston. Chris did not attend that meeting, and shortly thereafter she requested a leave of absence from which she never returned. I am envious of my predecessors—the 25 Chairs who had the great privilege to work side-by-side with Chris during their year as Chair. To her credit she has left an organization that is well-staffed, well-prepared, and professional in what they do, but that does not change the fact that she will be missed. The Section of Taxation is a better organization because of Chris Brunswick, and her legacy will be measured not only in the years she served as Executive Director, but also in the countless years that the Tax Section will continue to build upon the foundation she helped lay.

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