

American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division
The Affiliate

Welcome to Our Newest Affiliate—The Northern Kentucky Young Lawyers Section

By James Bilsborrow

In November 2009, the Northern Kentucky Young Lawyers Section (NKYLS) capped an incredible stretch of growth by becoming the newest ABA YLD affiliate. This completed a year that saw NKYLS membership increase to about 140 members, regular attendance at Section meetings quadruple, and the Section take an increasingly active role in philanthropic and social events.

The NKYLS geographically encompasses seven counties and lies across the river from Cincinnati, Ohio. According to outgoing Chair Matthew DeMarcus, an Associate with Wolnitzek & Rowekamp in Covington, Kentucky, the region has maintained a young lawyers section since at least 1998, but sought to affiliate with the ABA YLD as the Section's membership began to balloon in recent years.

That impressive growth was kick-started the old fashioned way, when committed members began making house calls on unaffiliated young lawyers residing in and around Northern Kentucky. The selling point? DeMarcus says that he told prospective members that membership made good business sense.

Good Business Sense

"Your relationship with other attorneys can help your clients," DeMarcus told potential new members. "If my opposing counsel is someone I know, we are going to work very well together to get a solution. But if I don't know the man, there will naturally be some apprehension about who he is and whether I can work with him. So, building relationships among lawyers will ultimately help your clients."

That pitch apparently resonated. Many house calls and a few years later, membership has soared. With a more robust member base, the NKYLS ramped up its philanthropic and social events, all with an eye to strengthening its affiliate and improving the surrounding community.

Public Service

On the philanthropic front, the Section's central public service project is the Truancy Mediation Project (TMP), a joint effort with the John G. Carlisle Elementary School in Covington. Truancy in Kentucky is a criminal offense, and a child who is absent from classes seven days in one calendar year can be referred for court intervention. The TMP is an attempt to prevent such intervention long before it becomes a realistic possibility.

Current Affiliate Chair Farrah Vaughn describes the TMP as a project in which "volunteers counsel elementary school children who have poor attendance in an effort to find out why these children have problems with coming to school, attempt to cure those problems, provide encouragement, and instill the importance of attending school regularly so that they will be able to achieve their academic goals." With some children, this requires a committed mentor relationship. With others, the fix is much more basic.

"Sometimes the kids simply need someone to buy them an alarm clock," explained DeMarcus. After a successful start-up year in 2009, the NKYLS is looking to ramp up member participation in the TMP in 2010, all in an effort to positively impact the Northern Kentucky community and strengthen bonds between members through service.

Social Events, Networking Opportunities

The NKYLS also hosts a healthy slate of social events to maintain networking opportunities and to keep its members in close contact with one another. In addition to monthly happy hour events, the group sponsors a day at the racetrack, as well as an outing at a Cincinnati Reds baseball game. As an added networking attraction, NKYLS invites local judges and established attorneys to these functions.

"At the Reds game, our members are sitting beside judges. So when they walk into court later on, the judge will recognize them," said DeMarcus.

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To top it off, the affiliate hosts an annual “Judicial Reception” for every new regional admittee to the Kentucky bar. As the event’s title suggests, many of those in attendance are members of the local judiciary, allowing the freshly minted attorneys their first opportunity to meet the keepers of the Northern Kentucky bench as bar members. These events are a great chance to mingle with colleagues in relaxed environs. They also present yet another business opportunity.

“When young lawyers pass the bar, they first need to find clients. One way to find clients is to have relationships with experienced attorneys. When those experienced attorneys turn down cases for whatever reason, who are they going to send them to?” explained DeMarcus.

ABA YLD’s Newest Affiliate

From the looks of it, the newest affiliate of the ABA YLD is hitting its stride. A growing membership, a commitment to the community, and a great place to build relationships with colleagues—welcome, Northern Kentucky Young Lawyers!

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