

American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division
The Affiliate

Affiliate Spotlight—Beverly Hills Barristers, 90210

By Rebecca Cross

Although the high school students on the *90210* television show may appear snobby and elitist, the young lawyers who comprise the Beverly Hills Bar Association are anything but. In fact, many of the approximately 2,000 members of the young and new lawyer branch of the Beverly Hills Bar Association neither live nor practice in Beverly Hills.

Membership

“The majority of our members come from the west side [of Los Angeles],” said Barristers President Sean O’Brien, “but we have members from all over southern California and even outside of this region.”

Barristers membership is automatic for any member of the Beverly Hills Bar Association who is either thirty-six years of age or younger or has been admitted to the bar for less than ten years. The Barristers make up a significant percentage of the Beverly Hills Bar Association’s 4,000 lawyers. The young lawyers are governed by a twenty-nine-member Board of Governors who each serve two-year terms.

“Having twenty-nine board member spots means any member who wants to can have a leadership role within six months or so,” stated O’Brien.

Activities

Barristers activities are focused on three primary areas: community service for the Beverly Hills and greater Los Angeles area communities, networking/socializing for its members, and MCLE opportunities for members.

One of the more physically demanding programs is a biannual “Bench/Bar Bike Ride,” during which the Barristers ride up and down Los Angeles beaches with other lawyers and members of the judiciary. The rides involve about a dozen attorneys and a handful of judges, who cycle from Manhattan Beach to Marina del Rey and afterwards enjoy brunch together.

Another unique Barristers program is its annual “Vintage Bouquet Wine Auction.” Held at the luxurious Greystone Mansion, the event features tastings from local wineries and restaurants and both a live and silent auction. The proceeds from this year’s event, held in May and coordinated by Committee Co-Chair and Barristers President-Elect Leigh Leshner, benefitted both the Beverly Hills Bar Foundation and Public Counsel, a prominent Los Angeles pro bono public interest law firm, founded by the Beverly Hills Bar Foundation more than thirty years ago.

The Barristers continues to implement the “Wills for Heroes” pro bono estate planning program after the 2008 ABA YLD Public Service Project, with the national Wills for Heroes Foundation, which serves first responders including firefighters, police, ambulance, and emergency medical technicians. Co-Chairs Lisbeth Bosshart Merrill, Jonathan Dennis, and Christopher Twining oversee the events, at which first responders are provided with a basic will, durable power of attorney for financial affairs, and an advanced health care directive.

The Barristers’ “Tolerance Through Education” program involves visiting elementary school students and teaching them tolerance for other points of view. This year’s event, chaired by Michael Eidelson, was held in March at Mar Vista Elementary School where young lawyers visited with third graders.

The Barristers also hold a legal clinic in Beverly Hills’ Roxbury Park on the first Saturday of the month. Committee Co-Chairs Betty Pan and Alex Grager coordinate the clinic, which is open to anyone and primarily involves legal referrals for elderly persons with housing-related issues.

Co-Chairs Dania Alvarenga and Sarah Talei, who is also Barristers’ Treasurer, oversee the Barristers’ “Brunch for 8” committee. This program serves participating law schools accredited by the ABA and California Bar Associations and coordinates brunch for groups of eight people, which include law school students and BHBA members.

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Get Involved

O'Brien, who has himself been a member of Barristers for four years, said he is focusing this year on trying to diversify the membership of the Barristers, which is limited, in part, because of the fact that BHBA is a voluntary bar association. But he sees his role primarily as one of encouraging young lawyers to get involved. "I don't really have to work hard to organize programs, all I have to do is be a cheerleader," he said. "My job is to get people interested and keep people interested. People want to do this stuff and put on these programs and help people. I have to keep everything going."

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