

Leading Forward: Key Goals for My Term as CBA President

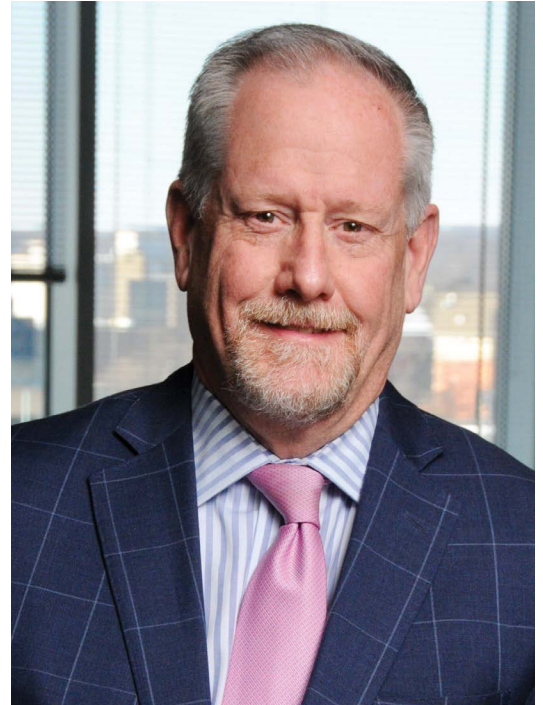
By JAMES T. (TIM) SHEARIN

The thing they do not tell you when you are selected to become vice president of the Connecticut Bar Association is that one day you will have to write six articles for *CT Lawyer* during your term as president. I open this article with that comment simply to ask for your forgiveness if somewhere along the way—perhaps even right out of the gate with this piece—I fail to write anything meaningful.

I am certain that every person who takes on this role comes to one realization very quickly and makes one promise soon thereafter. The realization is that the association is a tremendous resource for its members in particular and the profession in general. The work accomplished and the relationships formed through our committees and sections is inspiring; the number and quality of continuing legal education programs we offer is amazing; the Bar's leadership on diversity, equity, and inclusion is second to none; the membership benefits that we provide to facilitate the business of law is quite commendable; and, our commitment to fostering pro bono work is praiseworthy. Those examples are just the tip of the iceberg. The association does so much more. The promise a president makes in this job is not to mess up or undo what the previous one hundred presidents have done and what the incredible staff members we have do on a daily basis. I applaud those that have gone before me, including Maggie Castinado, our most recent president for all that they accomplished in creating such a strong and vibrant bar association.

Within the confines of not messing up, I do have some goals that I would like to

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accomplish which hopefully will redound to the benefit of our members.

By far, the largest block of CBA members are those in solo and small firms. What we hope to do this year is roll out a year-long program offering guidance that we believe will be helpful to the operation of those firms, such as a boot camp explaining the nuts and bolts of employment law for small businesses, discussing affordable technology options for small firms, and planning for the transition of practices in retirement. The association has access to experts in these and many other areas and we intend to offer that expertise to our members.

We tried last year, and we will again this year, to secure legislation that would permit the association to offer its own healthcare insurance policy, either directly or through an affiliation with some other entity. Too many firms—small, medium, and large alike—suffer from ever increas-

ing healthcare costs, in large part because most of us do not have enough leverage to negotiate with the insurers. Without a sizable number of lives to insure, we often fall into risk pools that are not attractive to insurers. Last year, legislation was proposed that would allow associations like ours to offer insurance options much like what municipalities offer. It had strong support from non-profit groups and business associations across the state, but got caught up in politics. We hope we can change that this year, but we will need your help to make a grassroots push. Speaking of legislation, we also plan to take a leadership role in promoting business-friendly initiatives. At base, we are businesses just like any other that prospers from a robust economic climate and friendly business atmosphere. There is no reason we should not advocate our position on that front.

We intend to take a fresh look this year at our membership recruitment efforts.

Like all organizations, the CBA must constantly reinvent itself to bring value to those who practice in the profession and advertise our value so those who are not members discover how much more they can improve their practices as association

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members. In many respects, you are our best salespeople. So, please let your colleagues who are not members know what they are missing. We will also be kicking the tires to figure out what else we can offer in terms of benefits. If you have any ideas of what benefits we can provide you through vendors or other third parties, please share them. We need your input.

I do have one other goal and that is to make sure that the association lives up to the very first sentence in the CBA's constitution that describes our purpose: "The purposes of the Association shall be to promote the public's interest through

the advancement of justice and the protection of liberty...." That sentence was first written in 1948, but its relevance to what is happening in 2024 could not be more apt. Courts, judges, and our very system of justice have fallen under direct, and often times, unjustified, attack which, in turn, has fueled public distrust of our third branch of government. In many re-

spects, "justice" is now defined by political rhetoric; and "liberty" has been swallowed by political agendas. In the wake of World War II, the authors of our association's constitution may have had a different view of why "justice" and "liberty" needed to be addressed. But, importantly, what they knew then and what we know now is that the "public's interest" in "advancing justice" and "protecting liberty" is what is to be "promoted." As persons, we can debate the outcome of court decisions. The First Amendment liberty ensures us that right. As lawyers, however, we should not debate our role ensuring that the process to "advance justice" and "protect liberty" for the "public's interest" through the court system is not compromised by politics. When it is, we should be the voice to change it. It is my hope that their wisdom will help shape out discussions on these topics in the months to come.

I welcome your feedback on these and any other issues you have on your mind and sincerely thank you for your continued membership. ■

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The CBA Is Here to Help

This Year's Section Co-Chairs—Sylvia Ho and Scott Schwefel—Want to Hear from You!

Contact us at masc@ctbar.org



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