

## The Bar Around The Corner: Monroe County Bar Association



This is the first of a new series that will profile the diverse number of local, women's, minority, specialty and special-purpose bar associations throughout New York.

New York attorneys have a wide range of practices and interests within the profession. The same is true for organized bar associations. Some associations focus on the rich diversity of their members' cultural and ethnic heritages, while other groups are based on professional practice areas. All provide opportunities for their members to develop business and social networks and to improve their standing within the legal field.

Susan Laluk of Rochester, (Hiscock & Barclay, LLP), president, introduces the first bar around the corner:

**Name of Association:** Monroe County Bar Association (MCBA)

**Association Address / Phone:** Telesca Center for Justice, One West Main Street, Rochester NY 14614; Phone: 585-546-1817

**Website:** www.mcba.org

**Founded:** 1892

**Number of Members:** Approximately 2,000

**Brief MCBA Vision:** The MCBA is an association of diverse legal professionals, recognized and respected for their proactive, innovative initiatives that promote professionalism in the practice of law, provide access to relevant information about the law and the judicial system, and advocates access to justice.

**Brief History:** Back in the late 1800s, Lawyer's Cooperative Publishing, now Thomson Reuters, settled in downtown Rochester, enabling lawyers to assemble law libraries on credit and at a fraction of the cost. In 1892,

Rochester's lawyers formally became a legal community with the establishment of the Rochester Bar Association (now known as the Monroe County Bar Association). The first president was Nathaniel Foote.

**The Association's favorite meeting location:** The Telesca Center for Justice, of course. We have the T. Carl Nixon Board on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor of the MCBA offices that serves as the boardroom for all of the Telesca Center partners. In addition, the Rubin Center for Education is home to the very active CLE program. This room accommodates 125 attendees, and serves as a great multi-purpose room for education programs, mock trials, and even wine and cheese receptions.

**Association's most popular outing / social event:** The Holiday Bench & Bar, held in December, where member judges are honored. The annual Law Day Luncheon, which is held collaboratively with the Greater Rochester Association for Women Attorneys and the Rochester Black Bar Association, is always a favorite of the legal community. And, the Annual Installation Dinner, where the association pays tribute to the outgoing president, welcomes and installs the incoming president, and the president of the Foundation.

On April 1, the Foundation of the Monroe County Bar is hosting a very special new event entitled, "Jazz for Justice." The collaborative partner on this event is the Eastman School of Music and some of their talented students. The purpose of this event is to raise the awareness of the Foundation and the programs it funds.

**Association's most pressing concern regarding the legal profession:**

The challenges that are facing solo and small practice attorneys. The association is seeing more new attorneys hanging their shingles with no experience and no accessible mentoring relationship in place to assist them when in need. As the association plans for programs and services to better meet the needs of its members, it needs to ensure that it is remaining relevant to them and to their practices.

**Association's goal for next month... next year:** Goal for next month: to make the dues budget of \$390,000, currently shy of that target by a mere \$4,500. This is a great place to be with 6.5 months to go yet in the bar year. Considering the state of the economy, and its impact on many professional associations, I am very pleased.

**Association's most important current project/initiative:** The MCBA has a long history of commitment to ensuring access to justice, and of advocacy for the poor. The MCBA and the Foundation have taken the lead on the creation of the Telesca Center for Justice, and the co-location of the civil legal service partners under a single roof for the benefit of shared space, services and convenience.

The association's preliminary goal was to raise \$560,000 through a capital campaign to cover the cost of renovating the space and negotiating a below-market lease rate for all of the Telesca Center partners. The MCBA and the Foundation has raised more than \$2.5 million, which also will allow us to complete the project with the renovation of the first floor lobby, making it more client friendly, and to add numerous technology improvements throughout the building, and establish an endowment fund.

In another initiative to support access to justice, the association is studying the merit selection of the Public Defender. A small task force of the board has been researching best practices from the American Bar Association and from other law-related associations. Once the task force's report is completed, it will come to the board for review and final approval, and hopefully make a recommendation to the Monroe County Legislature to depoliticize the selection process.

On the educational front, the association is preparing its inaugural launch

of live webcasting. We are excited about this new educational format, and though our members still prefer the live CLE format, we understand that there is a segment of the membership that will increasingly seek out the ability to receive their CLEs via the web. We want to be positioned to deliver this format.

In Rochester, succession planning is an ongoing issue in the profession. To begin to remedy the issue within Monroe County, the association has established the Lawyer Succession Registry (LSR). In this program, members can register their designee in the event of death, inability to practice, or retirement. The MCBA LSR is intended to be the "keeper of the data," and in the event that a court, a client or another attorney is in need of a client file, the MCBA, with the proper authority, can release that information to the person seeking the information. The association is not involved in the storage or maintenance of files, but acts as a clearinghouse of the pertinent contact information.

**If there were no budget restrictions, the first project / initiative the Association would take on:** To have the ability to offer free access to online legal research for members would be an incredibly valuable member benefit. The cost of legal research is significant, and for many solo and smalls, it is simply unaffordable. If this benefit were amongst the association's key member benefits, I believe we would attract another 300-500 members for this benefit alone. If the association can make their ability to practice law easier, and more efficient, that is the key to a long-term relationship with the attorneys in Monroe County.

**How the membership has helped to improve the Association:** MCBA members are incredibly generous. They pay dues to belong; they volunteer their time to serve as bar leaders, chairs, CLE presenters; and then they pay to attend our CLEs and other significant events. They keep coming, and coming and coming. MCBA membership is passionate about this association and the work it does. Their tireless commitment makes the association better. ♦