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HEARTBEAT OF OUR LEGAL PROFESSION

This March super-circulation issue of DICTA is for all the attorneys in Knoxville and surrounding counties. Knowing it was going to my colleagues who are not yet members of this great organization, I reflected on what my practice would be without the KBA. Before writing my message, I did what lawyers do - I researched the genesis of bar associations.

They began across the pond with the Inns of Court. Early groups in the United States formed at county and city levels, primarily to assure high standards for legal knowledge of bar applicants or to safeguard legal livelihoods. One of the earliest formed in 1740 in New York to repel the British Crown's encroaching whims. Kentucky lawyers organized in 1846 to oppose a groundswell seeking a constitutional amendment they viewed as attacking the profession. Although unsuccessful at the 1850 convention in preventing judicial elections, they advocated collectively as they saw fit. Precursors to the modern organizations, the first statewide bar was formed in New York in 1876, followed by the American Bar Association in 1878, with stated goals along the lines of facilitating the administration of justice, elevating honor and integrity, and promoting a spirit of kinship.

Contemporary bar associations have come a long way. They are much more diverse and have even broader and altruistic views, making them even more relevant to the current marketplace of attorneys. The KBA is one of these, with this stated mission to:

- serve as a leader in advancing excellence, ethical conduct, professionalism and public responsibility in the legal profession;
- improve the efficiency, fairness and accessibility of our system of justice for all citizens;
- take an active interest and responsibility in the affairs of government;
- increase the public's understanding of the legal system, the legal profession, and its role in the system;
- use the Bar's collective resources to improve the well-being of the community and its citizens, especially the youth; and
- to identify and support the needs of a diverse membership and foster an environment in which members experience a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction in the practice of law.

According to the website, our association's formal inception date is hard to pin down, but judging from memorial resolutions for deceased attorneys recorded in the Knox County Chancery Court, it was organized by as far back as 1895. While the law typically evolves slowly over time, the legal marketplace has changed much more rapidly, and especially so this past decade. The KBA remains amidst the fray, evolving just as quickly to remain relevant while managing a \$700,000 budget to meet the demands of our 1900 members.

First and foremost, the KBA's role is to support you as an attorney. I can only summarize its offerings, starting with this exceptional publication. I sent the last two DICTA issues to my family members from New Mexico to Melbourne, Australia. Attorneys and laypersons among them, they lavished comments about the incredible substantive content and quality of the writing. Membership opens access to a plethora of practice resources, including joining the 16 committees and 12 sections for free, more than 100 on-demand substantive law and practice management and technology how-to videos, an excellent website with your individual profile, integrated access to your e-community within the association and peer-to-peer listservs, judicial profiles with their courtroom procedures and advice, free online career classifieds,

and free conference room use. Mentor for a Moment introduces you to knowledgeable volunteer attorneys happy to discuss legal or practice issues.

CLE programs are a bargain and further discounted for members. The \$140 annual pass lets you meet your entire CLE requirement on a tight budget. Almost all live sessions are recorded, so if you miss a program, you can view it online for free, and if also want CLE credit, you simply pay the reasonable fee. For a nominal fee, the online firm directory service puts you front and center, searchable by the public to locate you individually, through your firm or by your practice areas. Members who participated for \$150 in the Lawyer Referral Service last year generated in excess of \$1,000,000 in fees.

The KBA has a Professionalism Committee devoted specifically to reviewing the Tennessee Supreme Court's proposed amendments to the rules of evidence, trial and appellate procedure, and conduct for self-regulation of the profession that govern our practice day-to-day. Maybe more than any other regional bar association in the state, the KBA weighs in and advocates for attorneys and their clients on these proposed changes. In January, the Board of Governors raised concerns about due process implications in suspending a law license for unpaid annual fees without confirming receipt of a prior notice that the action would be taken.

Although more virtual components have been added to membership, there is no substitute for the personal, face-to-face interactions through the many social and outreach programs. And memories like those from last night's Golden Gala would not be created. We honored attorneys who became licensed in 1949 just a handful of years after the Second World War ended, through 1969 when Adolpho Birch was appointed as Tennessee's first African American judge and Neil Armstrong of the Apollo 11 crew took his immortal "one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." The honorees were asked to write what they consider their career highlights. They shared a resounding sentiment for their cherished relationships with attorneys and judges developed through the bar association. A large contingent of them were former KBA Presidents and leaders. Maybe there is something to be said about longevity and bar membership.

Adrienne Koch, a litigator and an avowed "bar association junkie" like me, describes bar organizations as "the heartbeat of the legal profession." I like that characterization - not just because I write this message shortly before Valentine's Day, but mostly because it is spot-on. Without the KBA, my own practice would be drastically different and far less pleasurable. My path would have crossed only a small fraction of my colleagues. My legal universe would mostly be limited to those attorneys and judges involved in my cases and my experiences with them mostly limited to phone calls, emails, pleadings and court appearances rather than relationships. I would not have the same connections with the law schools or law students or young lawyers, or the same one-on-one access to legislators and the judiciary who make, interpret and apply our laws. Figuratively, my career would feel singular, and literally, I would have been stuck at my desk more. I would not be as invested in pro bono work or outreach service, and therefore, would have missed out on engaging with so many wonderful people in the community. I would have missed out on the deep satisfaction that comes through being a KBA member.

The KBA is a strong community. Tell us how it can better serve you or our profession. And if you are not a member, I invite you to join us.