

## The American Bar Association: A Valuable Resource

By **Keith B. Norman**

This issue of *The Alabama Lawyer* features five different articles about the American Bar Association (“ABA”). These articles cover a variety of the programs and benefits available to those who join the ranks of the ABA. I have been a member of the ABA since 1982 and can attest to what these writers say but I’m going to share my thoughts about the ABA from the perspective of a bar association staff member.

The ABA helps its members directly through a range of services and benefits. The fact is, however, all lawyers benefit at least indirectly through the ABA’s divisions, programs and affiliated organizations that serve local and state bars. The ABA’s Division for Bar Service (“DBS”), for example, is the entity to which bar associations and their staffs turn when they need help or information. Bar associations can request on-site visits from the Field Services Program for guidance on administration, management and substantive issues or even to facilitate meetings and planning sessions.

Our bar has benefited from the services offered by the DBS and from evaluative visits that have been requested from other ABA entities to obtain suggestions for starting new programs or improving existing programs. We have had volunteers from the ABA’s Commission on Lawyers’ Assistance Programs (COLAP) evaluate the Alabama Lawyers’ Assistance Program (ALAP) and even have a visit scheduled this month from representatives of the ABA’s Standing Committee on Client Protection to evaluate our Client Security Fund program. The visiting evaluation teams consist of volunteers who are active ABA members with experience in these same programs in their own states.

In addition, a number of our senior staff and officers participate in affiliated organizations whose operations are facilitated by the ABA including the: National Client Protection Organization; National Conference of Bar Foundations; National Conference of Bar Presidents; National Association of Bar Executives; National Conference of Bar Examiners; National Legal Aid and Defender Association; and the National Organization of Bar Counsel. Regular participation in these various organizations helps keep officers and staff abreast of the national—and international—trends and developments in these areas of the legal profession. Moreover, they afford an opportunity to network with colleagues from other bar associations who share similar responsibilities.

As a bar association, we are extremely fortunate to be able to call on the ABA for multifaceted assistance in all areas of our operations and programs. For the Alabama State Bar and other state and local bar associations, the ABA is a valuable resource.

## ABA Membership Has Broadened My Horizons

By **Patricia Lee Refo**

When I joined the American Bar Association, I found my horizons widened far beyond the walls of my law firm’s offices. I found tools to

make me a better lawyer and help me to better serve my clients. I found rich professional experiences and wonderful colleagues around the country.

The ABA has helped me learn about the nuances of the practice of law much faster than I could have learned them on my own, while introducing me to mentors who have guided my path through the association as I hope to guide others.

I know that ABA members are among the brightest and most unselfish lawyers I know. And, just as I realize that being a member of the ABA at any level signals a lawyer’s dedication to excellence in the profession, I realize that being an active ABA member takes time. Time invested with ABA activities, however, ends up paying dividends. And there are many ways to benefit from ABA membership without taking time away from your practice.

### A Wealth of Information

One of the best things about tools and resources from the ABA is that there is something for every lawyer in every practice setting and specialty. The ABA’s 28 sections and divisions range from Litigation to Intellectual Property and from General Practice to Government Lawyers. Each has committees and task forces that generate a wealth of extremely current and useful information for today’s practitioner—whether you are just starting out or a seasoned legal veteran.

For example, the General Practice, Solo and Small Firm Division offers a variety of services, ranging from the Solosez listserv—a virtual community of more than 3,000 legal professionals from across the country and around the world—to newsletters such as *SOLO*, which provides real-life solutions to the challenges of managing a solo or small firm and *Technology eReports* to help to run a successful practice. Other resources for general practice and solo lawyers include the division’s magazine, *GPSOLO*, and the twice-yearly *Technology and Practice Guide*.

If your practice is specialized, you can benefit from ABA information as well. Every possible practice area has been covered so that no matter what or where you practice, you can find information on current trends and thinking that help you best represent your clients in your area of specialization.

### Publications Promote Efficient Practice

Another benefit the ABA offers members is the discount on the latest legal publications. Operating its own publishing arm, the ABA maintains one of the leading legal publishing organizations in the world. Publications range from committee newsletters to e-mail reports to journals and books—all available through the ABA Web Store. One example, Edna Selan Epstein’s *The Attorney-Client Privilege and the Work-Product Doctrine*, is now the leading resource on attorney-client privilege issues.

And, when it comes to continuing legal education, the ABA is second to none. Along with the highest quality content and a huge array of courses, the ABA offers CLE in a variety of formats so you can find one that works for you. If you find that you don’t have time to get away, you can do your CLE training online at your desk or over your phone. If you want to network with other lawyers who share your interest in a professional topic or practice area, you can attend one of the on-site CLE programs presented by the many sections and committees of the ABA. By checking the ABA calendar, you can be sure that you can find an ABA program near you.

### The ABA Is the Voice of the Profession

For me, however, as critical as the ABA’s support is to lawyers on an individual basis, it is the organization’s support for the rule of law and the legal profession that really makes me proud I am a member. As the voice of the legal profession, the ABA works every day to advance the rule of law and improve our justice system.