

## 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.

For example, the ABA has taken the lead in protecting the attorney-client privilege from recent attacks, particularly by government agencies. The ABA was a driving force behind the important new Federal Rule of Evidence 502. Signed into law by President Bush in September 2008, this rule will reduce the skyrocketing cost of producing electronically-stored information in litigation. We also work to protect and preserve the independence of the judiciary, a core value of our association. The ABA serves as an advocate for the Legal Services Corporation, and has supported maintaining FDIC insurance for IOLTA accounts in the states that mandate the use of IOLTA monies to fund LSC.

Together, the ABA's support for the profession and its support for the individual lawyer make me very proud to be a member. I ask each of you to join me—and join the ABA.



*Patricia Lee Refo serves as chair of the ABA Standing Committee on Membership. A former chair of the ABA Section of Litigation and the American Jury Project, she is a member of the ABA House of Delegates. She has also served on the Advisory Committee on the Federal Rules of Evidence. Refo is a partner at Snell & Wilmer LLP in Phoenix.*

## The Alabama State Bar Provides Rich Heritage of Support for the American Bar Association

**By Henry F. White, Jr.**

Alabama has a rich heritage of support for and involvement with the American Bar Association. In fact, when Tommy Wells of Birmingham's Maynard, Cooper & Gale assumed the ABA presidency in August, he became the third lawyer from the state to serve in that critical role. President Wells follows in the footsteps of Henry Upson Sims, who served in 1929-30, and N. Lee Cooper, also with Maynard Cooper & Gale, who served in 1996-97. Providing distinguished leaders of the bar, such as these three, underscores Alabama's tradition of contributing to the ABA and its activities, a tradition that has been shaped by participation of the state's 5,000+ current ABA members.

In a particularly meaningful recent example of service, Alabama lawyers were critical to the success of last year's "Wills for Heroes" project, a public service endeavor that provides estate planning for emergency first responders. That effort was led by the ABA Young Lawyers' Division and the Wills for Heroes Foundation. Since September 11, 2007, participants from the Alabama State Bar Volunteer Lawyers Program have helped families of thousands of first-responders—police officers, firefighters and emergency medical technicians—in becoming an acknowledged nationwide model for "Wills for Heroes" efforts in other states.



*Birmingham attorney N. Lee Cooper and family—Cooper was the ABA president in 1996 and the second Alabamian to hold that office.*

### Alabama Lawyers Are ABA Members

Not surprisingly, nearly one-third of the practicing lawyers in Alabama are ABA members, and they are critical to the association in roles as experts on continuing legal education, advocates on Capitol Hill, architects of ABA policy, developers of new programming, and so much more.

In return, the ABA offers what lawyers from Alabama want and need by harnessing the best legal minds in the country. In fact, last year, ABA continuing legal education programs and expert publications served nearly 1,000 lawyers from the state. Additionally, ABA resources, such as its public education materials, toolkits to enhance local bar leadership, an online search engine to identify "second career" opportunities and an ethics hotline, among many others, helped thousands advance their professional careers. Moreover, ABA events, such as the Midyear, Annual and Section meetings, offer Alabamians networking opportunities on a scale that is second to none.

As the national voice for the legal profession, the ABA has direct access to key public policy decision-makers, benefiting lawyers in Alabama as well as local communities everywhere. Just last year, our leadership in Washington, D.C. helped to secure debt relief for public interest lawyers, worked toward preserving the attorney-client privilege in corporate fraud investigations and supported funding the Legal Services Corporation, to name just a few accomplishments. Work continues this year as the ABA lobbies on approximately 100 different legislative issues affecting both lawyers and ordinary citizens alike.

### Advocating for the Rule of Law

The ABA's efforts extend beyond domestic issues to include the global community as well. The country's current financial crisis and its depressing effect on the world markets demonstrate how interconnected the world has become. Advocating the rule of law is more important than it ever has been for the nation, for American businesses abroad and for American citizens traveling and working in other countries—and the ABA is at the leading edge of that advocacy. In July, the ABA's World Justice Forum in Vienna brought together hundreds of leaders from more than 95 countries to seed projects that advance the rule of law worldwide. As a result, a team from Asia plans to launch a program to educate migrant workers on labor law and their rights. Another team from Africa will start a rule of law awareness campaign targeting the troubled countries of Rwanda, Sudan and Uganda. Closer to home, a North American team seeks to reinstate civics education in three countries. These activities are just a sampling of the many transformative initiatives now germinating all around the globe. Today the ABA's rule of law work continues in more than 40 countries with even more initiatives on the horizon.

Issues of national and international significance are the ABA's bailiwick, while state and local bar associations lead in issues specific to their geographic communities. Each bar association has its own portfolio of offerings and specialties; there is little competition among the groups. Instead, there is a strong connection between the ABA and the state and local bars, one that is built upon collaboration and mutual benefit.

Those of us in the legal community share many common goals. Together, the ABA and the state and local bar communities are powerful partners that can achieve much together. The synergies between the groups will be espe-