

cially helpful as the legal community copes with the challenges presented by America's economic downturn and new threats to the rule of law abroad. Now more than ever, it is important that we recognize our collective power so we may realize the best for our profession, our community and the world at large.



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Lessors, representing the international container and chassis leasing industry throughout the world. White is a retired rear admiral in the Naval Reserve, who last served as vice commander of the U.S. Fleet Forces Command, the Navy's largest operational command. A New York City native, White is a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and the Fordham University School of Law.

Alabama Provides Fertile Ground for Growing ABA Leaders

By H. Thomas Wells, Jr.

Those of us who are lawyers in Alabama—like our colleagues across the county—find that membership in the American Bar Association provides us with chances to learn leadership while supporting our profession and our communities.

One indication that we stand to benefit from ABA membership is the fact that our state is fertile ground for ABA leadership. For example, my law partner, Anthony Joseph, is chair of the ABA's Criminal Justice Section. A.J. is one of 76 Alabama lawyers in the ABA's leadership directory. Our leaders are from towns and cities from Dothan to Birmingham, and from Fairhope to Montgomery. Alabama lawyers serve in the ABA House of Delegates and in a variety of ABA practice sections and committees.

Here's another thing to consider: Of the 132 ABA presidents over the years, three, including me, have hailed from Alabama.

ASB's Connection to the ABA

The Alabama ABA president immediately before me was my law partner, Lee Cooper, who served from 1996 to 1997. Like me, Lee had previously chaired the House of Delegates, the ABA's policy-making body.

The other ABA president from Alabama was Henry Upson Sims, also from Birmingham. Sims was a nationally renowned real property law scholar who has a faculty position named for him at the University of Alabama School of Law.

Sims, as the old Chinese curse puts it, led "in interesting times." He served as president of the Alabama State Bar from 1917 to 1918, America's years in World War I. He was president of the ABA from 1929 to 1930, right as the stock market crashed.

Today, we also live in "interesting times" and are dealing with our own financial crisis. At my request, the ABA has created a Task Force on Financial Markets Regulatory Reform. The group is coordinating the ABA's response to regulations proposed by the President's Working Group on Financial Markets and other actions taken by the Federal Reserve, the Department of the Treasury, the Securities and Exchange Commission and other federal agencies. It will inform the ABA's lobbying efforts in Washington, D.C. on any proposed legislative changes affecting regulation of the financial markets.

We also live in interesting times when it comes to the bar's common core values, values that inspire lawyers in their communities to work together and make a difference at the national level.

A Shared Sense of Core Values

Foremost among these values is access to justice. The bar is making a huge difference even as we have a lot of work to do. We know this in Alabama, which joined many other states when Chief Justice Cobb established the Supreme Court's Access to Justice Commission. The ABA informs and encourages the efforts of access to justice commissions throughout the country, and we're happy to work with Alabama's.

When natural disasters such as the Gulf Coast hurricanes strike, the ABA's Young Lawyers' Division always staffs legal assistance hotlines, in conjunction with state bars and FEMA.

At the federal level, the ABA and our state and local bars continually lobby to ensure adequate funding of the Legal Services Corporation—made all the more crucial by home foreclosures and other crises. Last April, we were fortunate to have Alabama lawyers Sam Crosby, Wade Baxley and Bill Broome and Tracy Daniel from the Alabama Law Foundation meet with Alabama's congressional delegation in Washington for ABA Day, our annual lobbying activity on behalf of Legal Services and other core issues of the profession. We appreciate Alabama's steady participation in this crucial activity, and we look forward to working together on Legal Services funding and other access to justice issues.

Developing Solutions to Aid the Poor

Access to justice is a front-and-center issue with another activity we're planning for the current bar year—a national summit in May on the critical role of fair and impartial state courts. The summit will foster a deeper understanding of the major challenges facing state courts in serving the public. It will identify ways the three branches of government can cooperate effectively to ensure that our state courts are adequately resourced and empowered. We're fortunate to have the involvement of Alabama State Bar President Mark White in our efforts.

I often remind audiences throughout the country that we lawyers in the South have a unique saying—that we're "called to the bar." Aside from the clergy, no other profession can point to its work as a calling. We minister justice, and our mission is public service. Only through our members' support can the ABA foster justice and public service at the local and state levels, and collectively on the national level.

As ABA president, I am privileged to serve Alabama's lawyers as part of America's larger bar community, and I look forward to your participation.



H. Thomas Wells, Jr., a partner and founding member at Maynard, Cooper & Gale in Birmingham, is president of the American Bar Association. He has served on numerous committees and in leadership roles in the Alabama State Bar, the Birmingham Bar Association and the ABA. His children, Lynlee Wells Palmer and Trey Wells, are also lawyers in Birmingham and active ABA members.

I Cannot Imagine a Legal Career without Membership in the ABA

By Elizabeth K. Acee

When I first started practicing law in 1999, an ABA membership automatically came with my new associate status.

However, I chose to become an *active* member of the ABA Young Lawyers' Division after I was mentored in my bar association activities by other lawyers who participated in the bar—both at the state and national level. My first experience with the YLD was speaking during a conference