

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.



Henry F. White, Jr. is executive director and chief operating officer of the American Bar Association, the largest voluntary professional membership organization in the world with more than 400,000 members. Before assuming leadership of the association in 2006, White served as president of the Institute of International Container

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

in 2001 on a program that I'd presented in Connecticut called "Gender and Credibility in the Courtroom," which examined whether women faced credibility issues on the basis of gender.

At that first conference, I quickly realized that there was a vast network of young lawyers who, regardless of their geographical region, were experiencing the same issues as a new lawyer that I was, and I connected with lawyers nationwide. Today, because of my ABA involvement, there is not a state in the country where I do not know a lawyer.

Over the years, I learned to appreciate the benefits of YLD involvement: networking opportunities, outstanding CLE and the ability to understand the profession beyond the local level—all benefits that have made me a better lawyer.

The Voice of the Profession's Future

The YLD gives us a voice. With approximately 147,000 members, we are the largest division of the ABA. We provide invaluable resources, including CLE, networking, pro bono and mentorship opportunities. We provide a New Lawyer Roadmap that assists new lawyers in navigating the ABA. We also offer leadership training, giving a young lawyer the opportunity to chair a committee, speak in front of a group, debate resolutions before the assembly, influence division policy, develop and implement programming, lead a team, supervise the work of others, and obtain affiliate leader training.

Although work-life integration can challenge young lawyers, the division provides opportunities for involvement at various levels, believing that YLD membership should enhance, not inhibit, career growth.

The YLD also offers young lawyers a home that embraces diversity, operating a scholarship program that encourages participation by racially and ethnically diverse lawyers, as well as lawyers from varied practice areas, including government and small-firm lawyers. Division committees focus on issues related to minorities, women and individual rights. Sitting on its council are representatives from four affiliate organizations: the Hispanic National Bar Association, the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association, the National Bar Association and the National Lesbian & Gay Lawyers Association.

The YLD is the public service arm of the ABA. As such, the division annually launches a national public service project that encourages young lawyers to become involved in community service activities.

A Tradition of Service to the Community

This year, the YLD will serve communities through the 2008–09 service project "Voices Against Violence," designed to educate young lawyers about domestic violence issues, particularly among the teen population. Its Web site, www.abanet.org/yld/dv, engages lawyers in taking on pro bono cases, coordinating community discussions, delivering presentations and taking part in advocacy.

The project encourages our 147,000 members to get involved in raising awareness of domestic violence issues while addressing the unmet legal needs of domestic violence victims.

In addition, the YLD works with the Federal Emergency Management Agency to provide assistance to disaster victims. Since 1978, when FEMA

first entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the ABA Young Lawyers' Division, the YLD has supported FEMA's Disaster Legal Assistance program. When disaster strikes and FEMA invokes the memorandum, the YLD goes into action, setting up and staffing a toll-free number so that qualified victims can obtain legal services. The YLD has helped victims of national disasters ranging from 9/11 to hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and most recently, Ike and Gustav.

By addressing the needs of the new and young lawyer, the YLD creates a source of future ABA members. The division instills a sense of the relevance of the organization so that by the time young lawyers "age up," they recognize the importance of active membership in the association.



The ASB Award-Winning Team (left to right): Navan Ward, who chaired the YLS Minority Pre-Law Conference Committee, Immediate Past YLS Chair George R. Parker (holding the award), and J.R. Gaines, Pre-Law Conference Committee co-chair

Mentoring Tomorrow's Leaders

This year, the YLD will serve its members through a Mentorship Project offering an online collection of articles, quick tips and audio recordings geared toward the needs of young lawyers. As part of this project, the YLD is working with StoryCorps® to share stories of mentorship in the legal profession. The recordings will be available on the YLD Web site and archived at the Library of Congress. At this year's conferences, the YLD will collaborate with the legal consulting firm of Young Maiden to provide career development programming and career counseling.

Additional plans this year include improving delivery of the resources young lawyers need, holding open discussions on diversity and continuing to work with FEMA.

For nearly 75 years, the ABA YLD has focused on giving back—giving back to our members, giving back to our communities and giving back to one another through networking opportunities and friendships that we form through our volunteer involvement. This year, we will continue to offer more pro bono and public service than any other professional organization. We will continue to serve our members—the largest contingent of the ABA. And we will continue to lead in diversity initiatives and as providers of disaster legal services.

I really cannot imagine a professional career as a lawyer without active participation in the American Bar Association. Following my term as chair, I hope to take a two-year seat as a YLD delegate to the House of Delegates, a move that will help me learn more about the total organization while remaining active in the YLD. I also plan to take a more active role in ABA sections, where I can continue to take advantage of some of the best CLE and networking opportunities available to the profession. Of course, I will maintain the many, many friendships that have grown out of my YLD involvement.



Elizabeth K. Acee, who serves as the 2008–2009 chair of the ABA Young Lawyers' Division, is a partner at LeClairRyan. She is a graduate of the State University of New York at Buffalo and the Case Western University School of Law, where she served as executive editor of Health Matrix: Journal of Law-Medicine. Acee is a fellow with the American Bar Foundation.