

Partnership with the Alabama Legal Community

By Michelle Behnke

Some 30 years ago, then Alabama State Bar Executive Director Reggie Hamner was appointed to a special ABA committee along with six other bar leaders and helped shape the ABA Division for Bar Services (the division) and what later became the Standing Committee for Bar Activities and Services (SCOBAS). The focus for SCOBAS and the staff of the division came out of a series of caravans around the country, convening groups of state bar leaders to discuss their needs and requests for services. It is this tradition of input and feedback from state and local bar associations that has been the *modus operandi* for the work of SCOBAS and the division through the years.

A History of Dedicated Service

The division is the ABA staff department dedicated to servicing state and local bar associations, and the division is the key link between the ABA and bar associations. Primary among the services that the division provides to bar association leaders are:

1. A national clearinghouse of information on bar association issues, such as bar management and governance, member services and programs for the public. In addition, it publishes *Bar Leader*, the nation's only bi-monthly news magazine that covers news, issues and trends of importance to leaders of state, local and special-focus bar associations. Its Web site, www.abanet.org/barserv/, features updates on services and connects to a host of bar association topic-related resources. It also includes an online directory of state and local bar associations around the country, linking to those respective Web sites, as well as an online job announcement service for bar associations seeking to fill staff positions.
2. Field and consulting services, including strategic planning, board education and retreats and leadership training. The Alabama State Bar was one of the first bar associations to participate in the Bar Association Operational Survey program, an overview "check-up" of the bar's operations that provides recommendations for increased effectiveness. Both the local bar associations throughout the state and the state bar have been the recipients of field service visits throughout the years, allowing for information exchange and sharing of resources.
3. Leadership training, exemplified by the annual ABA Bar Leadership Institute. With its focus on good governance, effective communications and inspired leadership, the BLI experience provides valuable information, resources and a network of colleagues upon which bar leaders can draw during their term in office. Bar leaders from the state bar and the Birmingham and Mobile bar associations have

regularly attended this two-day training program for presidents-elect since its inception in the 1970s. The program is open to the incoming leaders of all bar associations, and will be held in Chicago March 12-14, 2009.

4. Association management services for the National Association of Bar Executives; National Conference of Bar Presidents, of which the



Pictured above with the ABA 2004 Outstanding Law Day Activities Award for the play, "Cross That River," are Law Day Co-Chair Tommy Klinner; '04-'05 ASB President Douglas McElvy; Alan Kopit, chair, ABA Division for Public Education; Tim Lewis, committee co-chair; and Jane Garrett, co-author of "Cross That River."

Metropolitan Bar Caucus is a part; and National Conference of Bar Foundations. These organizations provide education and networking opportunities for the bar leadership and professional staff, and are governed by boards of their respective colleagues. The division serves as staff and the point of contact and coordination for each of the groups. Again, the involvement and contributions of Alabamians in and to each of these groups are noteworthy. Both Reggie Hamner and Keith Norman served on the board of the National Association of Bar Executives and Reggie served as president and as the NABE delegate to the ABA

House of Delegates, while Keith also chaired the all-important Program Committee. Two past presidents, Ben Harris and Fred Gray, served on the Executive Council of the National Council of Bar Presidents. Tracy Daniel, executive director of the Alabama Law Foundation, and Crystal McMeekin, executive director, Birmingham Bar Foundation, both served as trustees on the National Conference of Bar Foundations.

Addressing Concerns of Bar Leaders

Today, the members of SCOBAS continue to be drawn from elected bar leaders and bar executive directors. SCOBAS works with the division to share its collective experience as bar leaders and to link with current bar leaders to facilitate information sharing. SCOBAS members participate in the state and metropolitan bar regional conferences throughout the country to hear the concerns of bar association leaders who are trying to address the challenges in their own jurisdictions. We serve as your "agents" to deliver input for ABA priorities and action. We also communicate the efforts the ABA is making and the resources available for mediation of problems.

Together, SCOBAS and the division are your organizational link to the ABA and its invaluable resources for state and local bar leaders. As bar leaders we give voice to the challenges facing our members, our bar associations and our communities. And it is *your* voices that SCOBAS and the division represent at the ABA.

There is a rich tradition of collaboration between the Alabama State Bar and the American Bar Association, as demonstrated throughout this special issue. We hope to continue to serve you, your bar associations, your communities and the legal profession. ▲▼▲



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