

# Profiles in Progress: Client Stories

## Allegheny County Bar Association

We often hear the name, Allegheny County Bar Association, associated with a public service program such as lawyer referrals or evaluating candidates for judgeship. But many of us may be surprised to know that the ACBA employs more than 70 people, expends over \$7,500,000 annually into the local economy and runs multiple programs that directly benefit 6,600 practicing attorneys in Allegheny County and directly and indirectly benefit all 1.1 million of the county's residents. It is considered to be one of the highest functioning such organizations and serves as a model nationally.

The Pittsburgh Bar Association began 1870 with a membership of 18 attorneys. It later became the Allegheny County Bar Association, often referred to as the ACBA or Bar Association. It was created to support the profession of law, to promote professionalism, establish standards for practice and ethical standards and afford protections. The Bar Association promotes those goals within the profession and with the courts and the state legislature. It has also established a benevolent fund to assist lawyers and their families. As far back as 1918, 25 cents of the annual \$3 dues went into that fund. It



David Leonard, Senior Director of Finance, Ann Ewart, Senior Director of Operations and Human Resources and David Blaner, Executive Director

is now known as the Lawyers Fund which assists lawyers and their families who are in need, awards scholarships, fellowships and grants for research and writing in the study of law and justice and makes loans to deserving law students.

In addition, the Bar Foundation was established by the ACBA to operate programs such as the Pro-Bono Partnership, wherein member law firms provide free legal assistance to individuals and for programs that promote the public good. It also runs the Family Law Project and the Juvenile Court Project, both aimed to

assist the residents and legal practitioners of Allegheny County. The Juvenile Court Project provides advocacy for indigent parents through all phases of Juvenile Court dependency proceedings. The Family Law Project works similarly in Family Division. These are services and protections that could not otherwise be obtained by those families in need.

The Bar Association grew commensurately with the growth of our region and our country during the 1940s and was greatly assisted by the influx of attorneys educated after World War II by the G.I. Bill. Currently,

6,600 attorneys are ACBA members out of the 8,000 in Allegheny County. Non-members would include those employed in government, academia and by some corporations. While membership dues are an important part of the ACBA's revenue, it also supports itself with programs and services. The ACBA has both a non-profit side as well as a separate, wholly-owned, for-profit corporation. As such, it provides services and programs to practicing attorneys within the county on an economical basis. As a result, member dues fund only 23% of the ACBA's budget where the norm nationally is 60%. So a higher level of service is provided to members and the public within an economical cost structure.

One of the most visible manifestations of an ACBA resource is the Pittsburgh Legal Journal. It is published daily and lists all court proceedings as well as educational course offerings and matters of current law. This has become indispensable to practicing attorneys. In addition, the Bar Association acts as a forum for attorneys providing Continuing Legal Education courses and hosting networking functions and meetings on substantive issues in various legal disciplines. The Bar Association hosts sections and committees for each of the major divisions of the law. Lawyers specializing in those areas can meet regularly for study groups and to promote a better understanding within their specialized disciplines.

Finally, one of the most regularly visible services provided by the Bar

Association occurs each year when county judges stand for election and reelection. A special Judiciary Committee of the Bar Association publishes judicial fitness ratings. The average voter has no other way to evaluate the quality of the men and women who may someday judge them or the merits of their case. This has thus become an invaluable service to the county's citizens.

The Bar Association is distinguished by the sophistication of its staff and committee and board structure. There are 35 committees, 12 sections and 2 divisions made up of members of the profession who volunteer their time and expertise to guide and, in some cases, govern the activities of the ACBA. The Board of Governors oversees the entirety of the ACBA's activities. Then the Finance, Audit, and UBIT (Unrelated Business Income Tax) committees oversee their respective areas and report to the board. (UBIT is charged with keeping straight the relationship between the Bar Association's for-profit and non-profit ventures.) Then the Investment Committee oversees the multi-million dollar pool of investment assets comprising the multiple, investment funds that enable the many programs and resources of the ACBA.

(Fragasso Financial Advisors is honored to have been chosen by the Investment Committee and ratified by the Finance Committee and Board of Governors to provide investment advice to that pool of investment assets. And we are equally pleased to have been chosen to handle the 401K

retirement plan for the employees of the ACBA.)

The multifaceted activities, the multi-million dollar budget and assets, the more than 70 employees and the 35 committees are all coordinated by an adept management team made up of David Blaner, Executive Director, David Leonard, Senior Director of Finance, and Ann Ewart, Senior Director of Operations and Human Resources.

Dave Blaner joined the Bar Association in 1991 having been attracted by its business-like and entrepreneurial positioning. Dave had served as municipal manager in Clarion, PA and in Upper St. Clair after receiving his M.S. from Pitt's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs (GSPIA). He is married to Kelley, a nurse, who is the office manager for an Ophthalmology practice. Their children include Zack, age 16, and Lexie, age 15, both students at Moon Area High School.

Dave Leonard was also attracted by the entrepreneurial nature of the Bar Association and joined in 1999 after having worked for Sauerisen, Inc. for 20 years and serving as its CFO. Dave is married to Janice, who works in the office of the Register of Wills, and they are the parents of three grown children and the grandparents of seven. Dave received his B.S. in Accounting from the University of Kentucky and has held numerous accounting industry organizational offices and has received several industry awards, including one as Accountant Advocate of the Year when

he wrote and shepherded through the Pennsylvania legislature a bill establishing Sub Chapter S corporations in the state.

Ann Ewart joined ACBA in 1996. Ann had earned her undergraduate and law degrees from West Virginia University and practiced law in Charleston, WV., specializing in several legal areas, including litigation. Because she finished both high school and college each a year early, she began the practice of law at the age of 23, a fairly unique accomplishment. As a Pittsburgh native, Ann chose to return and obtain her MBA from the Katz Graduate School of Business at the University of Pittsburgh just prior to joining the ACBA.

The management team of the Bar Association can be justifiably proud of its accomplishments, but are not content to rest on those. When asked what is ahead for the ACBA, Dave

Blaner said the management team wants to continue to provide its services while anticipating the evolution of the legal profession looking a couple of decades into the future. They are trying to fashion services in ways that may not be currently perceived by lawyers today. The Bar Association sees the growth of mediation as an example. The Bar Association is seeking ways to educate its members in this and other areas and to facilitate their transition to new methods. Another example of envisioning change is to facilitate alternate careers for attorneys after their primary legal careers are finished. This would be especially helpful in light of the much-predicted shortage of labor and thus harvest a lifetime of experience to continue to benefit the local economy and its many non-profits. The Bar Association also wishes to better educate the public in matters before the courts. One example would be regarding pro

bono legal representation for the poor and another would be teaching the general public how to navigate the legal landscape and engage attorneys at their highest and best use. Dave foresees growth in legal areas that will coincide with the growth of our region. Those areas may include patents (think of our universities and research greenhouses) as well as environmental law and alternate methods of handling disputes. Adopting existing legal practices to these areas and new ways of operating will present challenges to the ACBA in helping to facilitate efficiency, competitiveness and productivity among its members while keeping the costs of doing so at a reasonable level. The ACBA is already researching and planning how to do just that. In all, the Allegheny County Bar Association is a powerful resource in our community that benefits many.