

TROLLING FOR NEW BLOOD

HCBA's new president out to sell the value of membership

By KEITH GRIFFIN

When Paul H. Rothschild moved his law practice from Boston to Springfield, back in 1976, his family was initially skeptical.

"My wife figured we'd be back [in Boston] in a year," he acknowledged.

Rothschild proved her wrong. Three decades later, he's not only still practicing in Springfield, but he's now the president of the Hampden County Bar Association. A shareholder at Bacon & Wilson, Rothschild's one-year term as president took effect in June, but the work of running the organization is just beginning in earnest.

Rothschild, 61, has served on the HCBA's board of directors since June 2003. He's been active in the organization since he began practicing here. Back then, lawyers joined their local bar associations because it was the thing to do, he said. The HCBA hosted events like a barrister's ball and there was generally more socializing among attorneys, Rothschild recalled.

Unfortunately for bar association membership rolls everywhere, times have changed.

Lawyers just starting out these days, he said, typically don't join very many professional organizations, and when they do, they want to realize a financial benefit



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from it. "They're interested in what the bar association can offer them to get their money's worth," Rothschild posited.

Sales Pitch

Like presidents of most bar associations, Rothschild has a goal of expanding its ranks. Currently, the local bar has about 750 members. Collectively they represent roughly 50 percent of the attorneys prac-

ticing in Western Massachusetts.

In targeting younger attorneys for membership, Rothschild said he can pitch the HCBA's growing list of member benefits. Among them, the HCBA offers free wireless Internet access at bar offices in area courthouses. The HCBA also is working on a photocopying facility for member attorneys.

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Rothschild: Financial Benefits Abound

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In addition, its referral service "is very active, which creates a lot of work and generates a lot of income for [members of] the bar," he said. The Children's Law Project also generates fees for members who represent children in probate court proceedings, he noted.

"There's a cost" to joining the bar, Rothschild said. "It's not exorbitant but maybe people don't feel they have the time. You have to make it attractive. You have to give them reasons to join. You can't just say it's [for] the camaraderie."

Good Exposure

Rothschild said the presidency of the bar association appealed to him late in his career because "I thought it would be a good thing to do and maybe accomplish something," he said during an interview in his State Street office. "Frankly, I find it interesting. At this point in my career, I know most of the people in town. It's gratifying to be involved at this level when you might be helping the system."

On a pragmatic note, he added, "It's good for the firm, good exposure."

This year Bacon & Wilson should get a lot of exposure in Western Massachusetts. Mark A. Tanner, an associate in its Northampton office, is the current president of the Hampshire County Bar

Association, as well. Rothschild said having two bar presidents shows the firm is well-regarded among area attorneys, and is interested in giving back to the legal profession. Rothschild is the fourth lawyer from Bacon & Wilson to hold HCBA's top office. The others were George Keady, Michael S. Rattner and Hyman G. Darling.

"Somehow along the way we got involved in the community, liked the practice and stayed," Rothschild said of coming to Springfield after four-and-a-half years of practicing in Boston.

He and his wife raised two children who followed in his footsteps, even going to Rothschild's *alma mater*, Boston University School of Law. Rothschild proudly points out a picture above his desk that shows him presenting his son, Jason, with his law degree. In an adjoining photo, father and son present a law degree to his daughter, Rachel. Both children now practice law in New York City.

Rothschild's legal career has been built around civil litigation, with a focus on representing plaintiffs in personal-injury cases. In recent years, he has also built an employment law practice.

Transition Period

Hampden County Bar Association leaders recently met with Mark Mason, the current president of the Massachusetts Bar Association, who practices at Springfield-

based Cooley Shrair, to talk about the possibility of bundling services and fees, Rothschild said. Those talks could lead to joint membership fees and services being extended to members of both bars.

A past president of the Springfield Jewish Community Center, Rothschild also would like to see the bar association increase its involvement in community activities. He has appointed former HCBA president David Martel to head up a community involvement committee. Community activism is important to members of the bar, Rothschild said, because they draw their living from the community. "We earn our living in the community and it's important that we give back."

Two months into his term, Rothschild said there are elements of the position that have surprised him. "There are many more calls on issues and meetings than I anticipated," he said. "I don't think you realize that until you take over. I'm looking forward to a good year. There are a lot of things going for us."

Among other duties, Rothschild will oversee a transition in the bar's staff. The HCBA's longtime executive director, Judy Potter, will retire at the end of the year and be replaced by her assistant, Noreen Nardi. "She's enthusiastic and has a lot of ideas," Rothschild said of Nardi. "Judy did a great job. She was the soul and strength of the bar association for a long time." ■