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Youth Movement

Hampshire County Bar's new president aims to draw more peers to organization

By KEITH GRIFFIN

Incoming Hampshire County Bar Association President Mark A. Tanner doesn't have a firm grasp on how many attorneys practicing in the county are recent law school graduates.

But his aim is to find out.

Instilling the roughly 300-member organization with new blood is among the top three priorities of Tanner's one-year term, which began this month. The other two, he said, are diversifying the geographic representation on the executive committee, and bolstering the Hampshire County Bar Foundation through more aggressive fundraising.

At 36, Tanner isn't much older than the age demographic he plans to target in increasing the bar association's membership rolls. An associate at Bacon & Wilson's Northampton office, he first started practicing at the age of 29 after a career in restaurant management.

In addition to his juris doctorate from the University of Wyoming, he has an MBA from the University of Colorado and worked in the Bronx as an assistant district attorney. Relocating to Massachusetts, Tanner joined Morse & Saks in Northampton before it merged with Bacon & Wilson two years ago. For the past three years, he has served on the Hampshire County Bar's executive committee.

Not a lot of Tanner's peers, however, are active in the local bar, he said. "It's important for there to be some representation from all demographics of lawyers on the executive committee," he said. That, Tanner added, includes geographic diversity, as well.

Not counting assistant district attorneys,

"My sense is the majority of our bar is older," he said. "Firms don't have the associates like Springfield firms. A big law firm in Hampshire County is five attorneys. Most firms are a couple of people."

But regardless of what size firm they work at, referrals from other lawyers are critical to establishing a law career, and belonging to the bar association is a sure-fire way to build those relationships, Tanner said. His sales pitch will be to tell attorneys just starting out: "You're going to make a lot of contacts [by getting involved in the bar]. You're going to meet others ultimately in court, but joining the bar gives you somebody to contact. In Hampshire, lawyers are extremely willing

to help you."

Tanner said the bar hasn't been as aggressive in sending out that message as it should be. "We have to do a better job marketing ourselves, about the good we can [provide] for young and new lawyers. It's the same for any lawyer. What's the relevancy of belonging to the bar? We need to develop a cogent message."

Community Outreach

Tanner also plans to be more aggressive in soliciting contributions for the Hampshire County Bar Foundation, particularly from industries associated with the legal profession such as title insurance companies and banks. "I'd like to



Keith Griffin

Incoming Hampshire County Bar Association President Mark A. Tanner said the local bar needs to do a better job of marketing itself—and the benefits of membership—to area attorneys just beginning to establish themselves in the legal community.

push it to the next level," he said. "It could really do some good in Hampshire County."

Building community ties is one of Tanner's strengths. In addition to being the father of two girls and a captain in the U.S. Army Reserves, he sits on the board of directors of the People's Institute, a nonprofit day care in Northampton. He is also active in the United Way, and has been involved for the past 18 months in Big Brothers/Big Sisters. When it comes to community

involvement, "Bacon & Wilson is very good about letting you do these things," he said.

A former assistant district attorney in the Bronx, Mark Tanner said the local bar's collegiality is one of its strongest selling points.

A litigator, Tanner focuses on plaintiffs' personal injury, land use and zoning, and general commercial disputes. In February, he successfully argued *Commonwealth v. Matis* to the Supreme

Judicial Court. The issue before the court was whether a defendant in a criminal case can inspect private property where that property is a purported crime scene. This issue has never before been addressed in Massachusetts and was decided in favor of Tanner's client, he said.

His one-year term as bar president will be made easier by the fact he genuinely likes his fellow members. "We have a strong collegial bar," he said. "It's something that somebody practicing in Hampshire can be proud of." ■