

President Gugliotti's Official Comment

The Hartford County Bar Association is the oldest bar association in the United States.

In 1730 there was by decree a limit on the number of attorneys that were allowed to practice law in Hartford County – ELEVEN - ! How times have changed!

This limitation was removed, but by 1751 the number of attorneys practicing in Hartford County was effectively reduced, the result of county re-districting. By 1783 there were all of 32 lawyers practicing in Hartford County.

These lawyers gathered together on November 14, 1783, and resolved to create an association for the betterment of the practice of law. That meeting was the creation of the Hartford County Bar Association, which will make the Hartford County Bar Association 232 years old come this November.

Since its inception, the Hartford County Bar Association has been instrumental in cultivating and developing the highest qualities in the practice of law in Hartford County and throughout Connecticut. The Hartford County Bar Association has always been the embodiment of the old adage – “Lead by Example.”

The Hartford County Bar Association has been a beacon of ethics, professionalism and civility since its founding, qualities which are every bit as important today as they have been in our 232 year history.

The Association has manifested its members' interest in helping to serve the public good by the creation of the Hartford County Bar Foundation. This is our 501(c)(3) entity which permits our Association to raise funds to donate to local social and charitable organizations which serve the needy.

The Hartford County Bar Association has accepted the responsibility of make continuing legal education readily accessible to its members. Our Association serves as the catalyst for the creation and presentation of very low cost, sometimes no cost CLE. We are able to utilize the Association's conference facilities at our headquarters at 100 Pearl Street for low stress, fast paced 2 hour CLE's. We also produce more lengthy, law-school quality CLE's, such as a program on trial evidence held at the mock court room within the offices of our friends at Shipman & Goodwin.

Through the Hartford County Bar Foundation, we assist with organizing the Cassidy 5K Road Race, which serves the two-fold goals of raising funds for our charitable Foundation, and creating an exceptional family experience at the Reservoir in West Hartford. The Association has created and maintains a “lawyer's lounge”, a quite refuge available to all members of the Bar, located at the Superior Court building on Washington Street in Hartford.

We have created and maintain one of the very best lawyer referral services highlighted by the weekly Saturday presentation on WTIC Radio “Law Talk”, where anyone can call in and get a discussion going on the legal topic of the day. Long-time member and past Association President John Matulis has been a Saturday afternoon fixture on WTIC radio almost as long as Ray Dunaway! In the course of each program John explains that if anyone has a legal issue and they don’t know where to begin to find a qualified attorney, they can call the Hartford County Bar Association lawyer referral service telephone number to be connected.

Several years ago, the Hartford County Bar Association recognized the need to help provide to young lawyers just starting their careers, a “safety net” of sorts - someone to talk to about the basics necessary to become an ethical and capable lawyer. The Hartford County Bar Association accepted the challenge of the state CBA and the gentle urging of Judge Kenneth Shluger to create and maintain a volunteer lawyer mentoring program. Under a one year program, an attorney just starting in practice has the opportunity to be teamed up with some of the very best lawyers in Hartford County.

Our Association has recognized the role it can play in maintaining the respect due to the members of the Bench. We have when necessary spoken out to aid members of the Bench who cannot defend themselves from unfair criticism.

With the above comprising just some of the activity of the Association, that leads me to the central point of my remarks tonight: “What else can the Hartford County Bar Association do now”?

There is an incredible anomaly out there today. In Connecticut and throughout the country there are tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands nationwide, of people who are in need of legal services, but who don’t have the resources to engage the services of a lawyer. These are not people who are looking for entry into the “retail legal system”, with the ability to pay standard rates for such services. I’m not referring to the large commercial or corporate consumers of legal services or contingency matter clients for whom legal fees aren’t an issue. Rather, I am referring to what is probably the great majority of our population, individuals and families, for whom legal services are generally unattainable for financial reasons.

Individuals and families who:

- Need a will
- Need help negotiating the purchase of a house
- May need to have rights protected in credit recovery situations
- Individuals who have rights under or landlord-tenant laws, but have no idea what they are
- Purchasers of an automobile that may be covered under our state’s lemon-laws

-Individuals in domestic relationship disputes where they try to handle something “pro se” to their detriment and the detriment of the court system

-Individuals who may have experienced unfair discrimination in the workplace or elsewhere

These are some of the many needs that go unserved.

Compare that need to the thousands of young lawyers, who when they entered law school had a hope, if not an expectation, to graduate law school, pass the bar and then get a job in a law firm. That hope and promise, almost routinely fulfilled 10 years ago, today goes unanswered for many. Simply put, there are many young lawyers out there who are not practicing law, while there are many people who need but can't afford a lawyer under conventional retainer arrangements.

How can we connect these two groups?

Modest Means Representation. We know what legal aid is and the constituents it tries so hard to serve. That's not “modest means representation”. We know what commercial and corporate legal services are. That's not “modest means representation”. Modest means representation falls in between those who qualify for legal aid, and those who can afford “corporate rate” or “retail” rate legal services.

This is a challenge I'd like to see the Hartford County Bar Association work to address in the coming year.

As I've thought about this I've come to realize that matching these two groups is not something that can be done in one year. This is a challenge that may take a decade to fully address. But it is my hope and one of my goals to get that process started during the coming year. How? We already have one element in place. Our Association's lawyer mentoring program. I would encourage - no, I'd urge, all the lawyers in this room this evening, all who have already had the good fortune to achieve some measure of success in our profession, to become a mentoring volunteer. As the saying goes, “pass it forward”. Anyone interested in joining our roster of volunteer mentors can contact me or our Mentoring Program Chair, Tom Rechen, to learn more about how this can be a rewarding experience for you and do something very good in the service of the profession at the same time.

Collaboration. We can get this started by creating opportunities to collaborate with the providers of legal education to cultivate in students this spirit and drive that this can be a pathway to a rewarding career in the law. Get your degree, pass the bar, hang out a shingle.

We are so fortunate to have, literally in our own back yard, the University of Connecticut Law School, now led by our own favorite son, Dean Timothy Fisher. Dean Fisher is way ahead of just about all of us in recognizing the need for new ideas in the delivery of legal services to the great “middle group”, many of whom need to obtain legal services, if at all, on a modest means basis. We are indeed fortunate that Dean Fisher is a great friend of the Hartford County Bar

Association, and we look forward to working with him to collaborate in this “modest means” effort. There are a good deal of positive initiatives that can be started at this very grass roots level of our legal delivery system.

We will also welcome the opportunity to work and collaborate with any of the other law schools in this region that have an interest in this need. No opportunity will be overlooked.

Incubator. This is the last ingredient that I have identified so far in the “modest means recipe”.

We need to create a sense of “place” for those who will become our pioneers in providing modest means representation. This ingredient may be harder to find than the other ingredients, but it may be as necessary as yeast in a good bread dough recipe. We need to find some “space” where some select number of modest means practitioners can work, support each other, and be found by client.

My hope would be to find some very modest currently unused Class B space in the city – but of course, we’ll take Class A space if someone forces it on us. Make no mistake – I’m talking about “free space”, so that the economics of getting started in a modest means practice will be feasible and practical. I’m looking for someone who has excess space not currently being used and won’t be used for one year or so. I’m looking for a \$1.00 per year lease. Sort of like the legal equivalent of commercial “pop-up retail” space that has gotten some attention in cities like Hartford and New Haven.

With that we can then qualify and place a number of true modest means practitioners. Our Hartford Legal Corps.

All we need is the space. In today’s digital age these modest means pioneers can do everything I ever did stating out, 40 plus years ago, with their laptop and a cell phone. All they will need will be clients – and we know there are hundreds out there who would qualify for such modest means representation.

When I started, a lawyer needed a receptionist, a phone network, a law library and on and on. Today you can do all that with just a laptop and cell phone. Well, maybe a tablet and a cell phone.

To this recipe add one measure of clients,

One teaspoonful of insight

One pound of energy

And viola: legal needs being served where they hadn’t been served before.

This is not intended to sound simple. It is not. But it is intended to sound achievable. But only if we get started.

So, this is my “big wish” for what may get started during my year as President of the Hartford County Bar Association. Along with that big wish, I have some other, more modest goals.

I’m reminded of the oath doctors take. I’ll add this to my goals and ambitions for the coming year: “*Do No Harm*”. I will try very hard to remember that our association should serve the needs of our members.

I will try to remember that unabashed idealism is a good thing.

I will try to remember that our Association’s presidents for the past 232 years have in effect collectively handed this gavel to me today, with the expectation that I will do my best to be worthy of being in that long line of succession, and to move the Association ahead.

But most of all, I will try to remember that if I pay attention to Jan Ambruso, Jeanette Bonee, Carolyn Hills and Jaki Sloan, I can’t go too far wrong!

Thank you!