

The Bar Around The Corner: Bar Association of Erie County



BAR ASSOCIATION
OF ERIE COUNTY

Association Address / Phone: 438 Main Street, Sixth Floor, Buffalo, NY 14202; 716-852-8687

Website: www.eriebar.org

Founded: 1887

Number of Members: 3,700

Brief Association Vision: To support members in meeting their professional and ethical obligations; to ensure access to justice; and to maintain the infrastructure and capability to fulfill our mission.

Brief History: A not-for-profit professional association, the Bar Association of Erie County was founded to “cultivate the science of jurisprudence; promote reform in the law; facilitate the administration of justice; elevate the standard of integrity, honor and courtesy in the legal profession; and cherish the spirit of camaraderie among the members thereof.”

What is your association’s favorite meeting location? Meeting locations are largely determined by event size. Larger events, such as the Judicial Candidates Luncheon, which typically draws an audience of about 400, tend to be held at large downtown hotels with full banquet facilities. Smaller meetings and CLE seminars are held in the conference/meeting space at Bar Headquarters.

Popular social events like our annual black-tie President’s Ball—held each spring to honor our current/former presidents—are held at a location of the president’s choosing, usually favorite local clubs or restaurants.

What is your association’s most popular outing/social event? The Annual Judicial Candidates Luncheon. Until the 1970s, the event was much more formal—some would say stodgy—and served primarily to introduce judicial candidates to members of the practicing bar.

The event was transformed into something much more light-hearted and high-spirited, and the tradition of “roasting” the candidates was born. Others around the country often express surprise at the no-holds-barred nature of the roast.

President Michael J. Ryan, who has served as roastmaster at the annual event, attributes it to “the camaraderie between the bench and bar” in Erie County and the fact that “judges are lawyers first. Once they ascend to the purple and don the robe, they don’t leave the past behind. They’re still very much a part of the bar.” In fact, Ryan received a call over the summer from a judge who wanted to know when the roast would be held. The jurist was making fall travel plans and didn’t want to “look like a bad sport” by missing the opportunity to be roasted.

What is your association’s most important current project / initiative? Our Disaster Preparedness Manual, to be launched in November. Immediate

Past President Kathleen M. Sweet appointed a disaster recovery task force in November 2012. Chaired by William F. Savino, the group developed a model disaster preparedness plan that will help local attorneys anticipate and plan for events that could disrupt their practices.

The task force recently completed its work and has released a manual, available at www.eriebar.org.

“The seed of the idea for disaster planning came out of the ABA meeting in New Orleans,” said Sweet, who noted that the meeting “was held on the anniversary of the week it was supposed to be held when Katrina hit there.”

“How that event affected lawyers professionally and personally and how it affected their clients, the court system and the legal community was, frankly, way more involved than I had ever considered.”

The meeting inspired Sweet to make disaster planning and business continuity one of her presidential initiatives.

“Although we will likely and hopefully never sustain a natural catastrophe of that scale here, the programs made me realize that my own firm could benefit from having some structured approach to readiness and planning so that the pain and aggravation of responding to an unwelcome event could be mitigated,” Sweet said.

The manual covers numerous aspects of the disaster recovery process and allows attorneys to save critical information about clients, employees, finances, insurance, utilities, computer files, passwords and much more.



Friendly roast—Hon. Frank Caruso, left, of Niagara Falls (Niagara County Supreme Court) serves as “roastmaster” at the Bar Association of Erie County’s annual Judicial Candidates Luncheon. President Michael J. Ryan is pictured at right. *[Photo by Terry Vine]*

How has your membership over the years helped to improve your association? Our members continue to be active and engaged in our programs and activities. Their willingness to share their time and talent—by serving in leadership roles, chairing or participating on one of our 40 committees, educating students and others about their legal rights through our public service programs—enables us to fulfill our mission and continually improve our offerings to our members and our community.

High-spirited events like our Judicial Candidates Luncheon provide stress-reducing comic relief for our members. These events encourage networking and collegiality, and enable us to remain relevant to both long-time members and newly admitted attorneys. ♦

The Bar Around The Corner is a project of the New York State Conference of Bar Leaders, www.nyscbl.org.