

The Bar Around The Corner: New York County Lawyers Association

NEW YORK COUNTY
NYCLA
LAWYERS' ASSOCIATION

Association Address / Phone:

14 Vesey Street, New York, NY10007;
212-267-6646

Website: www.nycla.org

Founded: 1908

Number of Members: 8,000

Brief Association Vision: Organized for charitable and educational purpose, to advance the science of jurisprudence and to promote the administration of justice and reforms in the law. NYCLA aims to promote the public good by, among other things, hosting forums on matters of public interest, issuing reports on important areas of legal reform, and arranging for the provision of free legal services for indigent, low income and other persons in need. NYCLA also aims to elevate the standards of integrity, honor and courtesy in the legal profession and foster the spirit of collegiality among Association members and throughout the bar.

Brief History: In 1907, a group of lawyers gathered in Carnegie Hall to form a bar group where heritage and politics were not obstacles to inclusion. They were determined to create, in the words of Hon. Joseph H. Choate, who would become NYCLA president in 1912, "the great democratic bar association of the City [where] any attorney who had met the rigid standards set up by law for admission to the bar should, by virtue of that circumstance, be eligible for admission." On April 21, 1908,

145 "attorneys or counsellors of the Supreme Court of the State of New York in active practice, residing or having offices in New York County" officially incorporated NYCLA. Since its inception, NYCLA has been at the forefront of most legal debates in the country. The Association's founders were, and their successors are, dedicated to the highest standards for the legal profession and the preservation of justice for all.

What is your association's favorite meeting location? Its building, the Home of Law, 14 Vesey Street between Broadway and Church streets in lower Manhattan. The Home of Law was built in 1929-30 and was designed by noted architect Cass Gilbert in the English Georgian style. The Home of Law was designated a New York City landmark in 1965 and was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1982.

What is your association's most popular outing/social event? Its Annual Dinner, which is held at the Waldorf Astoria each year in December and is attended by judges, government officials, bar association leaders, members of the bar and their guests. In 2014, the NYCLA Annual Dinner honored the Southern District of New York on its 225th anniversary. The event featured remarks by, among others, Hon. Ruth Bader Ginsberg and Hon. Sonia Sotomayor, associate justices of the U.S. Supreme Court. The dinner had more than 1,200 attendees.

What is your association's most pressing concern regarding the legal profession? While difficult to identify the most pressing concern, one area that is important to NYCLA is expanding the use of technology to increase access to legal services and minimize the cost. NYCLA is committed to



NYCLA Vice President Stephen Lessard, left, and Michael McNamara, president-elect, right, congratulate President Carol Sigmond during their first board meeting on June 8. Sigmond took office at the Association's Annual Meeting on May 28. Earlier in the year, the NYCLA was recognized with the 2015 Bar Leaders Innovation Award for its Pro Bono State Central Registry Project.

expanding access to and ensuring adequate funding for pro bono legal services and indigent defense. Embracing and quickly adopting technology in the practice of law will make it possible for lawyers to provide quality services to an expanding group of clients and make provision of legal services higher quality and more efficient. NYCLA would like to see the profession make legal services more accessible and affordable to all, including the middle and working classes.

If the Association had no budget restrictions, what project/initiative would you first take on? NYCLA has a robust array of pro bono programs, serving more than 1,600 individuals this past year, but there is always room to do more. NYCLA would expand its pro bono programs, both by launching new programs and expanding current ones. NYCLA would like to expand the pro-

vision of free legal services to low-income New Yorkers suffering the loss of benefits or other adverse consequences in city administrative proceedings. NYCLA is deeply proud of its tradition of public service and its current pro bono programs, which include the Legal Counseling Project, the Manhattan CLARO project, Project Restore, the State Central Registry Project, U.S. Tax Court Project, the Veterans' Discharge Upgrade Project, and the Unemployment Insurance Advocacy Project. NYCLA's leaders hope that with the volunteer services of its dedicated members, the Association will continue to assist more low-income New Yorkers through these programs, and new programs, each year. ♦

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