

The Bar Around The Corner: Westchester County Bar Association



Address/Phone:

One North Broadway, 5th Floor, White Plains, New York 10601; 914-761-3707

Website:

www.wcbany.org

Founded:

1896

Number of members: 2,000

Brief Association Vision: To promote the legal community and assist our fellow colleagues in the practice of law.

Brief History: We are proud that some of our members have risen to the highest ranks of the legal profession, including judges, members of Congress, law professors, managing directors of prestigious law firms and directors of nonprofit legal service organizations.

What is your association's favorite meeting location? WCBA headquarters is located in the heart of White Plains, where a majority of our members have their offices. Members congregate at the WCBA offices and nearby restaurants for committee meetings, board meetings, CLE programs and social events. We make every effort to schedule programs throughout the county to provide convenient access to members in locales other than White Plains.

What is your association's most popular outing / social event? The Annual Banquet each May provides an opportunity for current and prospective members to catch up with old friends, make new ones and meet the incoming officers of the association. We also recognize and honor members who have served the profession for 50 years. It is always a well-attended program.

What is your association's most pressing concern regarding the legal profession? Access to Justice. We are in alignment with Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman's passionate plea that the poorest of Westchester County's citizens be granted access to justice—the ability to reach out and obtain competent and zealous legal counsel to protect their individual, property and contractual rights, especially in times of economic turndown.

Access to justice occurs when our office responds to hundreds of calls monthly through our Lawyer Referral Service office, which is a clearinghouse for those who cannot afford legal representation.

For example, we refer callers who cannot afford an attorney to the Pace Community Law Practice (PCLP). The PCLP's mission is to meet the urgent need for quality, affordable legal services in Westchester County and throughout the Hudson Valley. The WCBA provides access to legal representation for our veterans by meeting the increased need for pro bono attorneys. We are co-sponsoring a CLE with Legal Services of the Hudson Valley to educate attorneys on veterans' issues so they may serve them on a pro bono basis.

The Pro Bono Committee conducts weekly "open hours" in the courthouse to meet with citizens who are being sued by creditors. We have adopted from our bar association neighbors, at their invitation, the Civil Legal Advice and Referral Office (CLARO) program to provide pro bono services.

Our Immigration Committee brought in state leaders to train our attorneys who provide pro bono services to illegal immigrants and their families in Westchester. We have collaborated with the Westchester Hispanic Coalition to educate attorneys on providing pro bono services.

What is your association's goal for next month? Next year? In May, the leadership will be turned over to the new officers and directors at our



Leadership honors—The Westchester County Bar Association held its Annual Meeting and Past President's Dinner at the Mamaroneck Beach & Yacht Club on March 19. WCBA President Jerold Ruderman, at podium, gives tribute to the evening's honoree and NYSBA member Joel H. Sachs, seated next to the podium. NYSBA's then- President-elect Designee Glenn Lau-Kee also attended. He is seated second from left at the upper table.

Annual Banquet. For the coming year, the WCBA will work to increase membership and promote an alliance with the Business Council of Westchester. The goal of this alliance is to answer our member's mantra, "find me a referral." By providing access to other professionals who can refer potential business, we are providing the opportunity for our attorney members to expand their practice and social network.

What is your association's most important current project / initiative? Membership. Bar associations provide a place for member attorneys to share information, meet in professional and social settings and speak in a unified voice on issues that affect the profession. We want to make sure our members are heard, and we want to make sure *all* attorneys are aware of the opportunities we provide.

How has your membership over the years helped to improve your association? Our leadership has taken very personal measures to diversify our membership by invigorating the Diversity Committee and inviting members from a variety of back-

grounds and experiences to take on roles as chairpersons, board members and Executive Committee members.

By searching for the best talent today who will fill leadership roles in the next decade, we are committed to developing our members. We provide an internship program within the association for law students who have not been able to secure legal positions, which emphasizes professionalism and law practice management skills. We are confident that interning with the association will expose recent graduates to attorneys who can provide employment opportunities.

On May 9, Jody Fay was installed as president of the Westchester County Bar Association during its 115th Annual Banquet in Tarrytown. Fay served as president of the Westchester Women's Bar Association from 2005 to 2007. She will join a select group of people who have served as leaders of more than one major bar association. ♦

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