

# Colorado Bar Association President's Message to Members

## *Making History*

by Elizabeth A. Starrs



On Monday August 7, 2006, the American Bar Association (“ABA”) will induct a new President and, for the first time in history, the President of the ABA will be a Colorado lawyer: Karen Mathis. When I learned of this, I sent a letter to all past Colorado Bar Association (“CBA”) Presidents to inquire whether any had personally known the person serving as ABA President during his or her own tenure as CBA President. The response was, without exception, “No.” So, I feel all the more secure in saying that this will be a unique experience with maximum benefits for CBA members.

Many of you may know that Karen is an “almost native” of Colorado, having moved here from Rhode Island when she was 13 years old. She attended the University of Denver, where she received her undergraduate degree, and the University of Colorado School of Law, from which she earned her J.D. degree. Karen was active in the CBA Young Lawyers Division and is one of the founders of the Colorado Women’s Bar Association. Without those experiences here in Colorado, Karen says she never would have been successful in her long ascent up the ABA ladder.<sup>1</sup>

“Service” sums up Karen’s agenda for her upcoming year as ABA President. Her focus will be on two primary initiatives that lie on opposite ends of the age spectrum: “Second Season of Service” and “Youth At Risk.” I have known Karen for more than twenty years and I can say, without hesitation, that she is tenacious. With Karen behind these initiatives, they are bound to be successful.

### **Second Season of Service**

The “Second Season of Service” (“SSS”) initiative focuses on the baby boom generation of lawyers who are beginning to leave the full-time practice of law. SSS involves four related efforts: (1) research; (2) public service; (3) the “Baby Boom Law Project”; and (4) the “Baby Boom Member Project.”

### ***The Effect of Retirement on the Profession***

To help us understand how we will manage this sea of change, the ABA is working with state, local, and specialty bars to gather data about the effect of retirement of baby boomer lawyers on the legal profession. The ABA fully expects to be able to identify best practices and models for the decreasing numbers of practicing attorneys on Bar participation, as well as the transition of leadership that will take place at law firms, corporate law departments, law schools, and the judicial system. In addition, every lawyer must address issues of succes-

sion, timing, compensation, management, and clients throughout his or her professional life, but especially as thoughts of retirement begin to enter the picture.

The benefit of working through these issues now is that we can be better prepared for the retirements that will cascade through the legal profession over the next thirty years. By 2018, the youngest baby boomers will be in their mid-50s and the oldest will be in their early 70s. Taking steps to plan for these changes now allows lawyers, law firms, legal departments and agencies, the judicial system, and law schools to undertake a thoughtful assessment of our needs and avoid uncomfortable last-minute, *ad hoc*, individual negotiations.

### ***Pro Bono and Public Service Opportunities Online***

The ABA intends to build a Web-based engine that facilitates *pro bono* work and public service by lawyers leaving the active practice of law. Lawyers who are approaching retirement will be able to go to a website and find a list of *pro bono* and public service opportunities in their communities. Karen estimates that if each retiring lawyer devotes fifty hours a year to such activities, there will be as many as 2 million hours annually devoted to good works. The initiative will help lawyers, law firms, law schools, and the court system address the retirement of a significant number of lawyers. The benefits to our communities will be extraordinary, and such service will enable the boomer generation of lawyers to continue a lifetime of service, thus proudly earning them the moniker of “The Service Generation.”

### **Youth At Risk**

Karen’s main project is the ABA’s “Youth At Risk” (“YAR”) Initiative. Because our nation’s future is in the hands of today’s youth, they are our most important asset. For young people to become independent, constructive adults requires attention and investment from many disciplines and facets of our communities.

The legal profession is facing many challenges in this regard—from status offenders to children of incarcerated parents. The problems that arise out of these situations require the expertise of many professionals, community agencies, and government officials.

Lawyers cannot solve all of the social problems attendant to this matter, but lawyers have a special role to play in assisting youth at risk in our communities, because the law and the

courts frequently serve as an important nexus to this segment of the population. By the time a minor gets to a court, the issues are serious and call for intensive efforts. Therefore, proactively addressing issues before they get to the problem stage is more sensible and productive than reactively trying to solve problems after they have developed or after a pattern of behavior already has been established.

The ABA YAR Initiative seeks to link the efforts of America's lawyers and other professionals with the needs of young people to effect positive change that benefits our communities. If we fail young people today, how will they be able to care for themselves and then cope with our needs in the future?

The YAR Initiative focuses on a growing population in need of our help now. In early 2006, the Initiative Planning Conference developed "Recommended Actions" for the ABA to implement. Among these Recommended Actions are such plans as expanding "Youth Court" and "One Child—One Lawyer" programs; convening a National Symposium on Status Offenders, which is an issue that has not been addressed in many years; and amending the ABA Model Rules of Professional Responsibility to address problems directly related to the juvenile and family court.<sup>2</sup>

### What Does This Mean for the CBA?

Because of Karen Mathis's ABA Presidency, CBA members have unprecedented access to the national platform enjoyed by the largest professional volunteer organization in the world, which boasts more than 400,000 members. The ABA's reach and resources are expansive.

### Transitions Committee

The CBA Transitions Committee will be involved in ensuring that our retiring lawyers have access to appropriate volunteer activities within the law and that our communities capitalize on the experience and energy. In the next fifteen years, 45 percent of the CBA's current membership will be over the age of 65.<sup>3</sup> This truly is an astounding statistic and the consequences of this to the CBA and to the profession will be unprecedented. Visit the CBA Website, <http://www.cobar.org>, for information about the CBA Transitions Committee.

### CBA YAR Committee

Finally, by the time you are reading this, I will have created a CBA YAR Committee to work with Karen to implement her initiative in Colorado. If members are interested in working on this project, please let me know. Your input is valuable and most welcomed!

Congratulations, Karen! We are proud of all of your accomplishments and are honored that, because of you, Colorado will be in the national spotlight.

### NOTES

1. For a recent profile of Karen Mathis, see Hartman, "Karen Mathis: Soon to be Colorado's First ABA President," 34 *The Colorado Lawyer* 65 (Aug. 2005).

2. These Recommended Actions, as well as complete information about the Youth At Risk Initiative, are available online at <http://www.abanet.org/youthatrisk>.

3. Based on CBA Membership database statistics. n



## Pro Bono Paralegal of the Year Nominations

Deadline for Nominations: September 1, 2006

On behalf of the pro bono legal community, the Colorado Bar Association (CBA) Paralegal Committee seeks paralegals deserving of recognition. Members of the legal community can help by reviewing the award criteria and nominating individuals to be Paralegal of the Year. Please note: membership in the CBA is not a prerequisite for nomination.

Nominees must have assisted in delivering legal services to members of the community who otherwise could not afford to seek legal assistance. The nominee should enhance the delivery of pro bono services.

This award is not based on the number of people to whom pro bono services are offered, or the number of hours dedicated. Rather, the award is de-

signed to acknowledge dedication and motivation. The award will be presented at a luncheon at Maggiano's Little Italy Restaurant in downtown Denver on September 15, 2006. A \$1,000 donation will be made to the award winner's pro bono organization of choice.

Complete information about this award, including nomination criteria, a nomination form, and a volunteer recognition form, can be found on the CBA website at <http://cobar.org/paralegaloftheyear.htm>.

Pro bono or community service organizations interested in appearing at this award ceremony, to provide attendees with information about their organizations, should contact CBA staff liaison Michelle Gersic at (303) 824-5342 or [mgersic@cobar.org](mailto:mgersic@cobar.org).