

Message from the Outgoing Chair

It's hard to believe that my time as chairperson of New York State Bar Association Trial Lawyers Section for 2018 is over. It has been a rewarding experience and I want to express my heartfelt thanks to the officers, Executive Committee, members, and friends of the Section.

We have accomplished much together in the almost one year that passed too quickly. We had nine Executive Committee meetings with terrific support from the committees. A tenth meeting was held during the New York State Bar Association (NYSBA) annual meeting.

We sponsored and supported the annual law school trial competition which Thomas Valet, Esq., headed up in February, 2018. We also supported the Young Lawyer's Trial Academy through scholarships in March, 2018.

We held the Section's summer meeting in Mystic, Connecticut August 2-5, 2018. It was a small group of attendees. Peter Kopff, Esq., chaired an amazing Continuing Legal Education program with a panel of prominent legal practitioners and a law school dean. Regrettably, the program was not videotaped. The dinner locations were excellent and the food was phenomenal. Our resident photographer, Charles Siegel, Esq., took lots of photographs and posted them in the Section's gallery.¹

As I prepare to transition to immediate past chair, I am looking back and I am proud to say that while the purpose of this message to the Section and executive board is not to reflect on specific elements of my tenure, I would like to share with you the sentiments which are most ingrained. The gratification that I now enjoy from reflecting on my experiences as the chairperson would not have been possible without the support, efforts, and participation of so many people, beginning with Section liaison Stephanie Bugos, my family, friends, and colleagues in the Section and the Executive Committee. No one individual can attain and maintain a position such as this without the help of many people. In that regard, among numerous others, I remain eternally grateful and appreciative of the help and cooperation of the executive board members.

Regarding the Law Students Committee, at the April 16, 2018 board meeting, I brought in Kyle Knox, the current chairperson, and Phillip Kostanakis from Touro Law School on that date; I also brought in Michael Ferguson and Brandon Ferguson, graduates of Cooley Law School. The four member-committee is currently up and working. Each member has promised to do an article for the *Trial Lawyer's Digest*. Some have begun to write articles while others are contemplating topics. Mr. Knox completed an article that will appear in a subsequent edition of the *Digest*.

In the past the Section's Diversity Committee sponsored meet and greets, speakers on courtroom etiquette and continuing legal education geared toward leadership development and stimulating and energizing new attorneys. Since mid-2016, to early spring 2018 the committee co-sponsored some meet and greets, but was otherwise quiet. With the consent of the Section's

Diversity Committee Chairperson, Angélicque Moreno, Esq., I kept Ms. Moreno as a co-chair for the downstate members and asked William Friedlander, Esq., to co-chair the committee and serve the upstate membership, which he accepted. Today, Ms. Moreno and Mr. Friedlander have rallied their thoughts together in proposing new beginnings. There are plans for breakfast meetings for law students and young lawyers which the chairpersons plan to begin later this year. Ms. Moreno and Mr. Friedlander also embarked on a plan to interview judges and profile the committee and Section's members. The committee completed an interview of Associate Judge Michael Garcia of New York Court of Appeals and the first spotlight on a committee member, Betty Lugo, Esq. Both are in this issue of the *Digest*. I look forward to continuing my service as a longtime member of this committee.

Sherry Levin Wallach, Esq., the longtime chairperson of the Section's Membership Committee, resigned in July 2018, due to additional duties as the Secretary of NYSBA and a member of one of President Michael Miller's task forces. I appointed Daniel Ecker, Esq., to serve as membership co-chair for the downstate members and Christian Zoller, Esq. as the upstate co-chair. In the summer of 2018, while in Mystic, Mr. Ecker discussed the co-chairs' plan to survey the Section members who did not renew their Section membership in order to gain insight and devise ways to better serve the Section members. The survey is now complete and I have no doubt that the results will point them in the right direction.

I also proposed a change to the Section's bylaws, to improve officers' accountability and participation, and to ensure that incoming officers are held accountable to perform their duties or delegate them in a timely manner to another consenting colleague. My goal was and continues to be to promote better organization and accountability within the Executive Committee.



I see exciting new projects on the horizon for the Young Lawyers Committee. I appointed Syed Fatmi, Esq., a Cooley Law school graduate, to join Sean Lescault, Esq. in this committee. While we wait for the Young Lawyers Section to appoint a new liaison we must add more members to this committee. I look forward to seeing this committee grow and thrive under its new leadership with Kevin Sullivan, Esq., as chairperson. Kevin's combined energy, creativity and leadership should no doubt allow the group to flourish with what we already have in place and point to novel and exciting new directions and activities for this Section.

In December 2018, Clotelle Drakeford, Esq., resigned from her treasurer position and as Young Lawyers Section liaison to the Trial Lawyers Executive Committee to focus on "growing" her law practice. William Friedlander, Esq., a longtime member of the Section succeeded her as the acting treasurer. Clotelle continues as a non-voting member of the Trial Lawyers Executive Committee.

of speakers included the Honorable Eugene M. Fahey, Judge of the New York State Court of Appeals, and distinguished law professors and practitioners from California, Miami, New Jersey, New York, and Ohio.

Finally, if you have called into or attended the Executive Committee meetings, shared a thought, lent an ear or participated in an activity, I sincerely thank you. It takes a collective effort to make a Section like ours viable, and I think it is only fair that special thanks also go out to all the members on our Executive Committee for all their hard work. Thank you, officers, members, and friends of the Section. Thank you for your unwavering support and the opportunity to serve a Section that deserves to grow and prosper, and **will** grow and prosper with your continued participation.

All of this leads up to the message I would like to leave with the entire Section and the Executive Committee, and all of you, especially the young people of our Section. Beyond my expression of appreciation, I

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This year we honor T. Andrew Brown, Esq., Mark Moretti, Esq., and Charles Siegel, Esq., with distinguished service awards. These members have gone way beyond their call to represent and serve the Executive Committee and Section.

While there is still much to do, Kevin Sullivan, the incoming chairperson, is invigorated, motivated and anxious to work with the ongoing officers and Executive Committee members to make the Section the best in the Bar. We should continue to make changes which improve the Section. If we continue to do so with the belief that the improvements we are making will allow us to move toward a better Section, I am confident that these changes and our beliefs will bring us closer together as a Section, stimulate our leaders to energize the committees to bring programs and activities into the Section, which will help us grow as a Section, attract new members to New York State Bar Association and to our Section, help us retain current membership and eventually improve and grow in profitability during future years to achieve the same profitability level we enjoyed a few years ago.

The joint annual CLE between the Trial Lawyers Section and Torts, Insurance and Compensation Law (TICL), entitled *Class Action Law Suits, All You Need to Know*, was held on January 17, 2019. I co-chaired the CLE with Lisa Smith, Esq., the TICL representative. Our cast

want to leave a message of hope, hope that many of you will consider devoting some of your professional life to serving in committees, participating in Section activities that prepare members for leadership positions and on task forces in NYSBA. Granted, while the hours are long and, like any endeavor, there indeed are frustrations, the rewards are limitless.

Growing a dynamic, diverse Section requires dedicated and committed people to ensure that the Section's committees are up and running and producing the result of all that we can be. Nothing happens on its own. I can assure you that should you devote some of your time, talents and energies to the purpose of serving on the Section's committees, task forces and positions that prepares you for leadership in NYSBA, you will get back much more than you give. I certainly do, and I have all of you to thank. I am confident that those of you who take me up on this suggestion will take a fond look back at your term(s) and feel the same way I do now. Thank you all.

Violet E. Samuels

Endnotes

1. I often wonder how it would be if the meeting was held at *Chateau Elan*, Georgia, which was my choice for the summer meeting!