

YOUNG LAWYERS

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A YEAR OF REFLECTION AS CHAIR OF THE YOUNG LAWYERS SECTION

A farewell article as my time as Chairperson comes to a close

It feels like just yesterday I was sworn in as Chairperson of the Young Lawyer Board. I will never forget the enthusiasm and motivation I felt taking my oath on April 10, 2022. Someone recently asked me what my biggest takeaway from my year of service was, and what immediately came to mind was, “Wow, that went quick.”

Almost immediately upon becoming Chairperson, I received the distinct honor of attending the American Bar Association Bar Leadership Institute in Chicago. At this conference, I received the single-best advice in relation to my year as Chairperson from a former ABA president, Patricia Lee Refo. She quoted Desmond Tutu, who said: “There is only one way to eat an elephant: a bite at a time.” What she went on to explain is that when you enter a leadership role with a limited amount of time, you have

to focus on what you can realistically accomplish in the time frame you are given. I took Patricia Lee Refo’s advice to heart (and mind) and immediately focused my year as Chairperson on what I could achieve during my tenure.

The YLB has been hard at work this past year; and for that, I dedicate my last article to the board and the amazing work they did. Below -I have compiled a list of the notable triumphs we have accomplished as a board this past year.

Joint Service Project with the Board of Governors for Mission West Virginia

During the month of September, the YLB and the Board of Governors joined forces to raise money for Mission West Virginia. Together, this joint service project raised \$15,000 for Mission West Virginia’s Emergency Fund, which

seeks to normalize experiences for West Virginia youth in foster and kinship care, while lessening stress and promoting self-esteem for foster children around our state.

Joining forces with the Board of Governors for a service project was something new that the YLB had never done during my six years on the board. As a young lawyer, it was exciting to be working along with the BOG, but also inspiring to see what is possible when the legal profession binds together for a good cause. The funds raised will go to items like school pictures, field trips, haircuts, summer camps, band instruments, back-to-school clothes, shoes, uniforms and equipment for sports and other school clubs, cap and gown, prom and homecoming attire and other needs for children in foster care. Donations also will help purchase new luggage filled with comfort

items and essentials to help ease difficult transitions to new families.

The YLB really enjoyed working with the BOG on this project, and we are hopeful that this is just the beginning of a great service project relationship in the future.

The YLB Christmas Project: Alive and Well (with a few changes!)

The YLB has long recognized that although Christmas is supposed to be the most exciting time of the year, for many West Virginians the holidays can be a difficult if not impossible financial task. Because of that reality, the Young Lawyer Section organizes a holiday drive every year to generate funds for fellow West Virginians. With the generous donations of lawyers across the state as well as YLB funds, we are able to purchase gifts for deserving families.

After many discussions, the YLB pivoted our approach in 2022 to try to reach as many families as possible. We selected Liam's Place, a state-of-the-art family visitation center that offers services such as supervised visitation, a safe exchange location, home studies and classes such as "life skills" for parents. The facility offers parents who might be struggling with addiction, mental health or domestic violence a safe way to visit with their children. As you can imagine, many times these parents do not have anything to give their children for their "holiday visit." This is where the YLB came in. Through our efforts, the YLB was able to purchase personal, requested gifts for West Virginia children whose parents might be struggling with substance abuse, mental health or domestic violence issues.

Professional Clothing Drive and Contribution to the WVU College of Law Clothing Closet

As young professionals ourselves, we recognize the cost associated with purchasing professional clothes. Therefore, in the spring of 2022, the YLB focused our efforts on collecting and donating clothing for young professionals. With efforts from our board, we were able to fill an entire large van with gently used suits, ties, dresses, heels, blazers and more. All of the clothing donations were disbursed to local shelters and programs focused on helping young professionals.

In addition to the clothing drive, knowing how

expensive professional clothing can be for law students who are financially struggling, we wanted to expand on this project. The WVU College of Law recently started a clothing closet for students in need of professional clothing for on-campus interviews, clerkships, internships, etc. We saw this as an opportunity to help. Therefore, the YLB voted to make a donation of \$3,000 to the WVU College of Law Clothing Closet.

We Are Still Bridging the Gap!

The YLB continues to work vigorously to bridge the gap between law school and the young lawyer's first legal job. All newly admitted members to the West Virginia State Bar are required to complete a mandatory "Bridge the Gap" program within 24 months of being admitted to the West Virginia State Bar. The YLB successfully holds two programs a year at different locations in the state. This past year, we held two very successful, in-person "Bridge the Gap" programs in Clarksburg and Charleston.

We have been working hard to execute our next "Bridge the Gap" program, which will be held at the Greenbrier at the Annual Meeting. During these programs, young lawyers are able to meet, network with and learn from judges, law professors, academic deans, managing partners of law firms and others. In addition, the YLB holds a panel discussion for the newly admitted lawyers to gain some insight and mentorship from lawyers who recently stood in their position.

The Future Is Bright

As I prepare to transition to Immediate Past Chairperson, I have full confidence in the YLB and the upcoming leadership. We have a hardworking board who continues to want to provide services to young lawyers around the state and give back to a state that has given so much to us.

Lastly, I would like to thank the West Virginia State Bar for this amazing opportunity to serve as Chairperson of the YLB. My involvement with the State Bar has been invaluable to my personal and professional development. I have made wonderful friends and colleagues throughout this experience, and I intend to pay it forward and continue to be an active, involved member of the State Bar in the future. **WVL**