

YOUNG LAWYERS

Lindsey D.C. McIntosh

Chair
Young Lawyer Section
The West Virginia State Bar



BRIDGING THE GAP

Newly admitted members of the West Virginia State Bar are required to complete “a mandatory Bridge-the-Gap CLE Program” within 24 months after admission to the Bar. The Young Lawyers’ Section is the entity that hosts this program. As many of us may remember, the Bridge the Gap program was previously a couple of disks that you had to state you watched, and you were on the honor code as having done so. It later switched to a mandatory in-person program. Since it has been an in-person program, the Young Lawyers’ Section has become responsible for the program and continued to modify the programing to ensure that it does what it states it should, which is bridge the gap between law school and law practice. While the gap cannot be bridged in a day, the Young Lawyers’ Section is proud of how the program has developed over time, and we see many benefits to what it provides young lawyers. This year’s Bridge the Gap program was

held at the Bridgeport Conference Center in late October. We had attendees from all over the state, as well as lawyers newly admitted to West Virginia from other jurisdictions.

The first thing that we went over at the meeting is what the State Bar does. This seems simple enough, but I think people would be surprised to find out how many attorneys pay dues every year and report their CLE credits to the State Bar, thinking they are a part of the West Virginia Bar Association. Our goal in going over what the State Bar does is to make sure that young lawyers know what the State Bar is, its obligations, the obligations lawyers have to it and the resources it offers. It also gives State Bar Executive Director Mary Jane Pickens the opportunity to talk about what she does and how she and her staff can be reached and utilized. The Young Lawyers’ Section would like to thank Mary Jane for presenting and being present for the remainder of this year’s Bridge the

Gap. Lawyers in West Virginia are lucky that due to our size and culture we have such an accessible State Bar, and I am glad that newly admitted lawyers have the opportunity to see that at the beginning of their careers.

Every Bridge the Gap, we also hear from the West Virginia Office of Disciplinary Counsel. This year, ODC Senior Lawyer Andrea Hinerman presented for our Bridge the Gap program on “Legal Ethics: How to Avoid the Office of Disciplinary Counsel and What to Do if You Have a Complaint.” Her presentation explained the ODC’s responsibility for investigating allegations of attorney misconduct and ensuring that lawyers in the state adhere to the Rules of Professional Conduct. She went over how the ODC investigates complaints filed against attorneys for violations of the code of ethics and the potential results, with the use of examples that kept the attention of the audience.

Another good presentation that

we have every year is one from the West Virginia Judicial & Lawyer Assistance Program, and every year we get a lot of good information through this presentation that young lawyers need to know. This year, Clinical Director Stephanie Thornton spoke about JLAP in her presentation, “Culture Shift: Tools for Sustainability in Legal Practice.” She went over what JLAP offers and its referral process and spoke about data collected from West Virginia attorneys anonymously about their substance use and mental health. While JLAP mainly deals with judges and lawyers who are in need of assistance, we are grateful to Stephanie and JLAP for sharing preventative information and resources in this presentation and on the JLAP website as well. This presentation is always engaging and extremely important.

A recent addition to the Bridge the Gap program is a presentation on civility by Rob Aliff, a member of the State Bar Board of Governors out of District 8 and an attorney at Jackson Kelly PLLC. The Young Lawyers’ Section has recognized a need for this topic as a part of its Bridge the Gap program because civility is a fundamental aspect of the legal profession that encompasses respectful and professional behavior in order to ensure that justice is administered with dignity and fairness. In his presentation, Rob went over the importance of being civil in your practice of the law and gave very engaging examples of incivility in the practice amongst clients, lawyers and judges. This topic is one that is often brought up in other presentations at Bridge the Gap, but we are thankful for the level of focus and attention Rob’s presentation brought to the topic.

Another recent addition to the program is our very own Young Lawyers’ Section Board Member Mitch Moore, who is our District 14 representative out of Morgantown. Mitch presented on “E-Filing Versus Paper Filing: How to and What to Avoid.” Every year the Young Lawyers’ Section evaluates what we think newly admitted attorneys would be interested in or need to know about to succeed in their practice, and Mitch’s presentation covered a topic that young lawyers need and want to know about. He discussed both e-filing and paper filing, where e-filing is available and the practical realities of both in this state. The Young Lawyers’ Section Board has worked hard to make sure that the topics discussed at our Bridge the Gap program are practical for new admittees, and Mitch’s presentation is one of the most practical in assisting young lawyers.



Another area that the Young Lawyers’ Section Board has worked hard to develop in its Bridge the Gap in-person program is having judges present on issues that they feel are important for young lawyers to understand. For the last couple of years, we have been privileged to have the Honorable Judge Michael Aloia and Honorable Judge Omar Aboulhosn present on “Federal v. State Court Civil Practice” from the perspective of U.S. Magistrate Judges, as well as Judge Joseph Reeder and Judge Robert Richardson, West Virginia Circuit Court Judges, present on “The Attorney’s Duty to the Court and Counsel: What Circuit Court Judges Expect of New Lawyers.” These presentations focus on expectations that judges have for lawyers who are appearing in their courts, including knowing the rules of the court, appropriate preparation and showing respect to the court through a respectful practice and demeanor with court staff. In years prior, Judge Joanna Tabit presented with Judge Reeder. She was and continues to be a shining example of what a respectful practice of law can earn you in your career and how you are remembered.

The Young Lawyers’ Section Board thanks all of you for taking time out of your very busy schedules to present and answer questions.

Lastly, every year during our Bridge the Gap program, the Young Lawyers’ Section Board puts on a moderated panel discussion on “The Plight of the Everyday Young Lawyer: Work/Life Balance.” This discussion includes questions on time and practice management from a variety of perspectives. This year on our panel were our district representatives from District 3, John Isner; District 4, Sophia Mills; District 9, Morgan Spolarich; and District 13, Bonnie Thomas. I moderated. Of these representatives we had a parent, a large firm, a small firm and a public practice perspective.

The Young Lawyers’ Section is very proud of our Bridge the Gap program, and we would like to thank all of the presenters who make this program what it is. Personally, I would also like to thank our amazing Executive Board: Nicholas Gordon, Secretary, who organized this year’s program, and Chair-Elect Taylor Coplin, who organized the spring program earlier this year when she was Secretary.

While this program is geared toward new admittees, these topics are important and likely of interest to lawyers of all ages. Presenters for our Bridge the Gap program often present at other CLEs around the state, as well as State Bar regional meetings. **WVL**