

Sailing to Distant Shores

“My mother told me, someday I would steer a galley with good oars, and sail to distant shores.” - Age-old Viking Song

THIS IS MY FIRST COLUMN AS PRESIDENT of the Philadelphia Bar Foundation. It has been a privilege to serve as a Trustee of the Foundation since 2009. This has been an honor; but more importantly to me, it has been an inspiration. The quality of the people who dedicate their time to the Foundation and the quality of those who work at the various legal service organizations supported by the Foundation is awesome. I am humbled to follow Steven Bizar, partner at Dechert LLP, who provided strong and wise leadership for the Foundation while somehow balancing a busy trial schedule.

The Foundation has ambitious goals to achieve for the cause of equal justice, as I head into my two-year term as president. We are truly sailing to distant shores. I will need your help – all of you – to grab an oar and rally the legal community to fulfill the promise of the exciting opportunities that lie ahead.

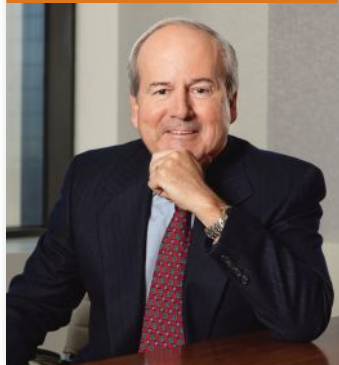
But first let me step back and properly introduce myself.

I was born in the Logan section of Philadelphia and grew up in Upper Darby. I have been married for 41 years and have five daughters, one of whom will be graduating from the Temple University Beasley School of Law in May. I seem to be a serial father of the bride with daughters having been married in 2014, 2015, 2016 and one newly engaged and set to be married in 2017.

I attended college at the University of Dayton. I taught high school English for five and a half years after graduating from college. I attended law school in the evening while continuing to teach, becoming a proud graduate of the Temple University Beasley School of Law. I am most appreciative to Temple for affording me the opportunity to attend school at night while working during the day.

I started working at Marshall Dennehey Warner Coleman & Goggin, P.C. in 1979 as a paralegal and have served as the firm’s president and CEO since 2005. My practice has always focused on civil defense litigation. Over the years, I have represented corporations, individuals, and insurance companies on a wide range of issues but focusing most on product liability, premises liability and medical malpractice cases.

By Thomas A. Brophy



At Marshall Dennehey, “community involvement” is one of our core principles. We are deeply involved in and dedicated to the civic and charitable needs of Philadelphia and to all of the communities in which our various offices are located. Members of our firm serve on nonprofit boards and we have been long-term donors in “Raising the Bar” since we were first approached by past Philadelphia Bar Association Chancellor Alan M. Feldman to do so. We have several firm leaders participating on various Foundation and Association Sections and Committees and in other volunteer positions.

My personal enthusiasm for the Foundation’s mission of equal justice is driven by the need – and professional responsibility – to reduce or eliminate the overwhelming barriers facing many disadvantaged Philadelphians. Our city has one of the highest rates of people living in poverty in the nation, more than 25 percent of the population. People struggling with poverty, abuse or discrimination face obstacles that can be insurmountable without timely legal assistance, the kind of legal help that people of means can afford and often take for granted. The lack of access to justice often leads to lost opportunities for education, employment, housing, family unity, health care, safety and much more. These barriers add up to ultimately compromise the ability of individuals to exercise their basic rights and fully participate in our economic and civic systems. Those of us in the legal community with the means to help have an obligation to get involved and ensure our neighbors receive justice.

I fully agree with Chancellor Deborah R. Gross, my dear friend, as she emphasized in her inaugural remarks on Dec. 7 that the legal community must now dig deep and work together, taking collective

Donation Opportunity

Contributing to the Philadelphia Bar Foundation shows you care about our justice system and the assistance it provides to the community. With one contribution you are supporting all the public interest legal organizations in the Philadelphia area that serve those who need a lawyer to help them assert their legal rights but who cannot afford one. For more information, please visit www.philabarfoundation.org.

action to support Philadelphia’s amazing network of nonprofit legal aid organizations. Our shared philanthropic and pro bono efforts can help to protect individual rights, ensure the rule of law and due process, and guard against inequity and intolerance.

The Foundation plays a leading role in these access-to-justice initiatives. It is the only foundation in Philadelphia solely dedicated to supporting our city’s legal aid community. We accomplish this mission by delivering grants and technical assistance in support of the full range of quality legal services, addressing unmet legal needs, and providing education on matters in the public interest. In just the last five years, the Foundation has given vital support through nearly \$3 million in unrestricted grants to 38 organizations.

Over the next two years, I hope to help steer our little vessel toward an ambitious vision of equal justice for all. I need your help for several key initiatives to successfully reach these “distant shores.”

As Chancellor Gross has emphasized, we must start the funding and construction of an Equal Justice Center. The EJC will be a national model for co-locating dozens of Philadelphia’s legal aid organizations in a central location to strengthen client services and realize operational and cost efficiencies.

The legal community should also aim to significantly increase its philanthropic and pro bono support for access to justice issues. This kind of generosity and commitment is in the best interest of us all, by raising individuals out of poverty, preserving overall community well-being, and improving confidence in the legal profession.

In addition, it is increasingly important for the entire legal community to come together in support of legal aid at the major events sponsored by the Foundation. The Golf & Tennis Classic in June and the Access to Justice Benefit in November are truly fun events for a great

cause. The Young Lawyers Division also sponsors an outstanding annual fundraising event benefiting the Foundation. These events provide unique opportunities for the members and leaders of the legal community to raise the profile of our mutual philanthropic efforts.

The leadership, staff and partners of the Foundation work very hard to raise money for the benefit of the 38 legal service organizations that the Foundation supports. One of my priorities as President is to increase the number of attorneys who are engaged in these efforts and to persuade the legal community that the Foundation should be the “default” charity for lawyers. Philadelphia lawyers are busy balancing the demands of their jobs, their families and their communities, especially at certain times in their careers. It is at those times that lawyers should look to the Foundation and the legal service organizations it supports as a place to give money if they cannot give time.

I and other Foundation Trustees will be in touch to help you get involved in these exciting opportunities for progress. Please let me know what the Foundation can do to make this easy and rewarding for you and your firm, corporate legal department or other law-related business.

Thank you for joining us in ensuring equal access to justice for all in the Philadelphia region. Together, we can sail to reach those distant shores.

Thomas A. Brophy (tabrophy@mdwvcg.com), president and CEO at Marshall Dennehey Warner Coleman & Goggin, P.C., is president of the Philadelphia Bar Foundation.