

Ohio State Bar Association program helps cultivate leaders in legal profession

By ANNIE YAMSON - The Daily Reporter | Friday, June 17, 2016

Earlier this year, 20 attorneys from across Ohio graduated from the 2016 Ohio State Bar Association Leadership Academy.

Now in its sixth year, the program aimed at helping young lawyers make a name for themselves is going strong and boasts alumni who have gone on to do great things.

“That’s the most fantastic part,” said Sylvia Brown, director of bar services at the OSBA. “We have folks who have joined our council of delegates which acts as our representative body here at the bar, we’ve had folks who have moved up in their practice, one in particular has become a partner, we’ve had folks who are at the attorney general’s office and really have begun to network so that they can think about public office.”

“One of our academy graduates was just appointed to our board of governors, which is our governing body,” said Kenneth Brown, director of public and media relations for the OSBA. “That, frankly, is quite an honor for a young lawyer.”

Six years ago, the OSBA Leadership Academy was organized upon recognition of the need to provide leadership growth opportunities to younger bar association members.

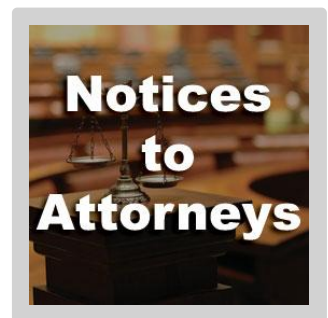
“It’s more and more challenging for young folks to make a name for themselves,” said Kenneth Brown. “The economy has been a little tough on them.

“We thought what better way for the bar association to serve the needs of its members than to help them gain the skills that they can use in their firms and their communities and our association?”

Simply because the lawyers are young does not mean that they are inexperienced. The criteria for admission into the academy states that an attorney must have at least five to 10 years of practice in the state of Ohio under their belt.

“Really we’re looking for folks who have a commitment to the legal profession, to improving it, and to leading the profession into the future,” said Sylvia Brown. “Part of that is finding younger folks who have sharpened their skills already but who are ready for the next level of leadership in their practice areas and firms.”

The leadership academy is a commitment of six to seven months. Six sessions



Leadership is obviously a covered topic but other subjects include professional development, community service and state and local government.

“As you can imagine, as our environment has changed over the years, so has leadership,” Sylvia Brown said. “It’s one of those concepts that you can go in many directions and, specifically this year, we have focused a lot on how to affect the legal profession in a way that helps those who don’t have access to justice.”

Participants in the program pay a \$1,000 tuition, with the exception of a few scholarships based on financial need.

The time commitment and the expense, Ken Brown explained, means that participating lawyers have some “skin in the game.”

“It’s not just that they sign up and show up periodically, they really make a time commitment and for a lawyer, that’s pretty significant because those are billable hours,” he said.

The academy does allow participants to earn 12 continuing legal education credit hours and with class sizes of up to 24 people from different parts of the state, the networking opportunities are also valuable perks.

Recent academy graduate Jeremy Young, an associate attorney at Roetzel, said that part of the reason he applied to the program was for the opportunity to get to know both the bar association leadership and other attorneys in the state.

“I had a very positive experience and there are kind of two ways that I think about it,” Young said. “First, and probably the most important, is meeting my classmates because it really is people from all walks of the profession.

“I’m obviously at a bigger firm and we had a handful of lawyers from other big firms, and then a lot of small and solo practitioners from all over the state, from local courts and counties where larger firms like mine don’t have a presence, and then we had a couple court magistrates and one or two government lawyers, so it was a very diverse group and getting to know those people was really valuable to me.”

Recently, Young said that he ran into one of his classmates while working on a case in Mansfield.

Those encounters are bound to happen for graduates of the academy, who also have access to a network of alumni in Ohio.

The other benefit that Young said he gained from the academy is firmly rooted in the curriculum.

“They really did offer an array of substantive instruction,” he said.

The group went to the statewide forum in Cincinnati and took part in a symposium on race in the profession.

Another session included a comprehensive personality profile intended to help the attorneys pinpoint their strengths and leadership style.

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The students also learned about professional development and personal branding, a leadership coach was brought in as were social media marketing experts.

“We also got a really good look at what services the state bar provides, everything from CLE to written publications and how we can get involved in those and online communities,” Young said. “Just the various ways that the state bar is advancing the profession and working on securing justice for everyone.”

Young said that he plans to use his experience to get more involved in the OSBA.

The newly elected president of the association, Ronald Kopp, is a partner at Young’s law firm and Young said that he is excited to get involved in some of the new initiatives that Kopp is planning.

“Then there are the more traditional opportunities to get involved as a member of the board of governors or council of delegates,” Young said. “I’m not sure that a council of delegates campaign is in my immediate future but it’s certainly something that I’m entertaining as time goes by.”

That type of dedication to getting involved is one of the key purposes of the academy, according to Kenneth Brown.

“Lawyers are pretty well known for being involved not only in professional development but they sit on local boards, run for local office and do a lot of volunteer work,” he said. “So our efforts to help prepare them to be really additionally contributing members of their community is something we hear from them that they really like.”

Attorneys like Young, who graduate from the academy and then go on to get more involved in the bar association, are an illustration of the academy’s ability to create a mutually beneficial relationship between the bar and its members.

“It’s a two-way street,” Kenneth Brown said. “I’ve had the pleasure of speaking to the classes on a variety of topics and it is so neat to get to know these young people and help them get involved more deeply in the profession. They benefit a lot but so do we at the bar.”

More information about the OSBA Leadership Academy can be found at ohiobar.org.



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