

OSBA | Lawyer. Volunteer. Kopp.

Getting to know OSBA President Ron Kopp and his initiatives during his 2016-17 term.



By Nina Corbut

It's no surprise that Ron Kopp was elected President of the Ohio State Bar Association. He knew he wanted to be a lawyer since he was in government class when he was 13 and his teacher assigned the class to write a paper on what they wanted to be when they got older. Ron wrote about his interest in the law and government, and that he really wanted to help people. When he got to college, his aspirations were confirmed as he "got the bug" and went to law school.

It's obvious that Ron enjoys helping people. He has been volunteering for community organizations for his entire career, beginning as a trustee of the Summit County Historical Society in 1984, an appointment that he kept until 1997. Also during that time span, Ron graduated from Leadership Akron in 1987 and chaired its

Media Day Committee until 1997, while also serving as a trustee for the United Disability Services (1987-1993) and the Akron General Medical Center Foundation (1988-1994) and as secretary of the John S. Knight Memorial Journalism Fund (1989-present). He also led the Akron Bar Association as president in 1996-1997. His service to the community did not end in the '90s, though. Ron was trustee (again) of the United Disability Services from 1999-2005 and secretary and later chair of the Leadership Akron Board of Trustees from 2006-present. In 2004, he volunteered on the Akron Bar Foundation Board of Governors (of which he was a founder) until 2012, and joined the OSBA Board of Governors that same year. After two years on the OSBA Budget and Headquarters Committee, one year as chair of that committee, one year on the Audit Committee and one year as president-elect, Ron will spend this year as OSBA President.

Ron thanks his mentors, who taught him early in his career that giving back to the community is important and fulfilling. Ron believes that "We all should try to leave our community better than we found it."

When Ron is not spending time in his volunteer leadership roles, he spends his days practicing as a partner in business litigation at Roetzel and Andress, the firm he has worked for since 1979.

We recently had a chance to visit Ron at his law office in Akron, where he showed us around his office and sat down for an interview.

What is rewarding about practicing law?

RK: The intellectual challenge and learning about new things, especially in business litigation. Every case involves a new subject area, whether it be engineering, chemical formulations or shareholder disputes. I also enjoy the opportunity to help people. I love meeting people, working with them and occasionally feeling that perhaps I made someone's life a little bit better.

Practicing law gives me the opportunity to be out in the community. Our firm encourages lawyers to engage in activities that benefit the community and the bar. As a result of that, I've been able to do a lot more than if I had chosen another line of work.

When did you first get involved with the OSBA?

RK: I sat on a panel for the Law and Media Conference many years ago. Over time, as I stayed involved with that conference, I had the opportunity to be elected to the Council of Delegates and was on the council for a number of years. Through my local bar association work, I had the opportunity at state and national conferences to work with people at the state bar and grew to know them and like and respect them. When I was invited to run for the Board of Governors in 2012, I agreed to do that and happily was elected and have continued in a deeper way my long affiliation with the state bar association.

If you could change one thing about the OSBA, what would it be?

RK: I would love for every lawyer in the state of Ohio to be a member of the state bar association. I think that it is such an important organization for lawyers in our state. Not every lawyer is a member, and those folks are really missing an opportunity for themselves and also to improve the profession.

What do you wish other people knew about the OSBA?

RK: I think a lot of people don't understand the span of coverage that the OSBA has: our constant work with the Ohio Supreme Court, our consistent and constant work with the Ohio Legislature, our work on behalf of Ohio citizens, whether it be addressing school to prison issues, or sentencing reform issues, or issues pertaining to taxes on legal services—those kinds of issues are all around us. We tend to sometimes work a bit in the background and I think that the public and our members don't always know that.

If you were trying to convince a non-member to join, what would you say?

RK: If a legal professional is considering joining the OSBA, I would say a couple things. First, you will receive tremendous benefits from our organization, whether you need help with legal research, whether you need help finding a job, whether you need some breaks in getting your CLE, whether it would be member benefits; there are many reasons personal to you to become a member. But there's something that I think is more important, and that is to join the cause to move the process of justice forward, to be involved with improving our profession and making our system of justice better for those who live in Ohio.

How do you see the legal profession changing over the next five years?

RK: Our largest issue will relate to the computer. The computer continues to be, in many ways, I think, in its infancy. What we are seeing in the legal profession with respect to companies like LegalZoom, RocketLawyer and Avvo, I believe is only at its beginning. Anticipating changes that will come through the computer and how people will be able to use the computer—lawyers and clients and courts—that's going to be our biggest issue to contend with for the next several years.

What do you do when you're not working or volunteering?

RK: I love to play golf during nice weather. It's probably too time consuming and I'm way too bad at it, but I enjoy it very much. Some of the best friends I've made in my life have been as a result of golf. I also love to read. I'm constantly reading or listening to a book—almost every moment when I'm not with family, working or golfing. I also spend time with my wife Jean, three wonderful kids and four grandchildren, including twins born just this summer.

Why did you want to be president of the OSBA?

RK: Some might think I'm a little crazy, which I am, but as I became more involved with the state bar association, I became more aware of the wonderful work that the state bar does. And I will tell you that I probably would not have agreed to do this were it not for the fact that we have such an excellent staff at the OSBA. I really just thought that I might be able to make a difference for a couple of years. I think I have some skill in leadership, and I'm trying to exercise whatever skill I have in that regard to see if I can help our organization and our members move forward.

What issues do you intend to work on during your term?

RK: The first is to work very closely with the Futures Commission, researching how our profession will change over the next few years and how we want to respond to those changes. One of the items that we'll be looking very closely at is organizations that, through the Internet, have come into our state and have begun competing with lawyers in our communities, whether those organizations be Avvo or LegalZoom or RocketLawyer or others, we are looking at ways those organizations may help the public, but at the same time, looking at ways that we may want to recommend to the Ohio Supreme Court or state legislature that those organizations be regulated.

The Ohio State Bar Association also will continue to be deeply involved in Ohio's struggle with the opioid epidemic. That epidemic has been described as one of the largest legal and medical challenges we've had in at least a generation. Ohio is the epicenter of that epidemic, so we will be talking with the Ohio Supreme Court, the Ohio Legislature, the Attorney General and others about ways our members and the state bar can be involved in solving those issues, especially on the legal side because it's pretty clear that harsh sentences are not the answer. We need to educate, inform and collaborate with leaders across the state to get this epidemic behind us.

I would like to continue past president John Holschuh's work on access to justice, but this is not my effort, and not solely John Holschuh's effort. It is the effort of the Ohio State Bar Association and the entire legal community to find ways to increase access to justice for those who have not had access or sufficient access. Not only for people who fall below the poverty line, but also for people of modest means. We are working closely with the Ohio Supreme Court, the Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation, the Ohio State Bar Foundation and many others across the state. I intend to make sure that our bar association continues working on those issues.

I would also like to see us redouble our efforts in diversity. We've done a terrific job in diversifying our board and our staff. I recently met with leaders of the African-American Bar Associations across the state. We all agreed to continue talking with one another to strengthen our relationships and find ways in which we can collaborate. We will also be meeting with leaders of other minority bars, such as the women's bar associations, LGBT bars, Pan-Asian Bar, and Latino bar associations, looking for ways to collaborate with one another to better serve the public and their various audiences.

Can you tell us about a rewarding case you handled?

RK: The most rewarding cases I've handled have been those related to resolution of disputes between shareholders of closely held companies. The disputes often involve family members or friends, and they can be very painful—not unlike domestic relations matters. Assisting individuals with disputes such as those generally helps preserve the company, maintain jobs, and begin a healing process between people that probably should have started long before.

What advice would you give to a new attorney?

RK: As someone who has mentored new attorneys for most of my career, it is very important that you find older, more experienced bar members who are interested in helping you and giving you advice. Establish friendships and relationships with those people. Do not try to do it on your own. If you're going to hang out your shingle, it's

absolutely essential that you make those friendships and connections. The best way to do that is to become involved in the Ohio State Bar Association and to be involved in your local bar associations.

How do you feel about your upcoming year as president?

RK: I am just absolutely delighted and thrilled to be the president of the state bar. I was going to say it's a dream come true, but really, it's a dream that was beyond my dreams. I had no idea that I would ever have this opportunity in my profession or my career. And to think that I am sitting here and able to work with such fine people with so many wonderful talents from across our great state is beyond anything I could have ever imagined. I look forward to meeting and working with our members.



1. He's not always serious.

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2. He used to train horses.

When we asked Ron to tell us something about him that others probably wouldn't know, he responded: "When I was a kid, I trained horses. My first job was cleaning out 60 horse stalls a day during the summer. Some people say that I've never really changed, and that I'm still shoveling it."

3. He's a gentleman.

Ron took us to the Summit County Courthouse so we could see the Court and get pictures of him in one of the hearing rooms. As we all filed into the elevator, the doors were almost closed, when Ron reached forward to hold the door open for a young mom who had her hands full with an infant in a carrier and a young toddler in tow. Ron held the door for her to step onto the elevator and also held the infant in the carrier for the elevator ride. The mom was thankful, but it was second nature to Ron. It was as if this was something all people do.

4. He is a family man.

Ron and Jean, his wife of 34 years, have two daughters, one son and four grandchildren.

5. He loves to travel.

Ron loves to travel with his wife, sometimes for business, sometimes for pleasure. Among many other places, he has traveled to all parts of western Europe, Scandinavia and Peru.

6. He likes America.

The band.

7. He knows his ancestry.

When he was in his 20s, Ron took an interest in trying to understand his roots, so he started interviewing his grandparents and other family members to gather information about his heritage. As he got older and spent more time at his job and with his family, he took a break from his research, but picked it back up in 2006, when he could do more research online. Ron said that this opened up a whole new world. He discovered one line back to the 1500s, but the one brick wall that he could not get through was finding where the "Kopp" ancestors were from. After many years, in 2012, he discovered that his great great great grandparents were from southwestern Germany. He was able to contact someone in that area, who helped Ron find out more information about his ancestors, dating back to the 1500s. Ron discovered that his family was from the small town of Gultstein.

In 2015, Ron and his wife visited the town and reconnected. They found the address of his relatives, and visited the site, where part of the barn they owned was still standing. They also found the church where most of his

Kopp ancestors were baptized, married, etc.

Ron also discovered that his third great grandparents eventually moved to Massillon, Ohio, with their eight children. After they arrived in Massillon, the mother, father and four of the children died from typhoid fever within 30 days of one another. Ron visited their graves in Massillon cemetery, and was moved by the experience, as these ancestors are the reason he is here today.

8. He loves Ohio colleges.

He graduated from Miami University, and then attended The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law.

Author bio

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This article was originally published in the July/August 2016 issue of Ohio Lawyer.

