

Robert Neuberger, 2003-04

Staff, facilities

I was on the Board when Judy Edwards was hired to replace Mona Buckley and therefore served the second full term as a President after Judy became an Executive Director. Mike Greene was President when Judy was hired, followed by Bob Newell, and then by me. Kathy Maloney, Guy Walden and Carol Hawkins were on the staff both before and after Judy became Executive Director, and they did tremendous work between the time that Mona left and before Judy became Executive Director and then following Judy's coming on board. During my term of office, Noelle Saint-Cyr joined the staff and became administrator for member services and events. One of the exciting events during my term was the completion of the process of identifying new lease space, and the office moved from where it had been located for 10 years in the old Kress building next door to the 620 SW 5th Avenue building.



Board members

Board members included Sylvia Stevens, Jeff Matthews, Kelly Hagan, Tom Christ, Lori Deveny, Peter Glade, Hollis McMilan, Jennifer Oetter, Sim Rapoport, Helen Smith, Agnes Sowle, Diana Stuart, Kathryn Villa-Smith and Bob Newell.

Approximately one-half of the board members that I served with were women. Half of the presidents that I served with or under on the board were women, including Judy Snyder, Ruth Beyer and Sylvia Stevens. Much effort was devoted to maintaining gender and area practice diversity, and attempting to recruit ethnic members and other minorities to the board. Unfortunately, ethnic diversity issues have been difficult to overcome in the Oregon and Portland legal communities. This is despite strong efforts of the attorneys and legal community.

Historical events

The September 11 attacks occurred during my second year on the Board and directly impacted the MBA in its role as steward of the justice system. Economic downturn in the country and in Oregon led to decreased tax revenues and deep cuts in the judicial branch's budget, resulting in layoffs and the closure of the courts on Fridays for a period of time. Local attorney Brandon Mayfield was held in custody shortly before the 2004 annual meeting in connection with the Madrid bombing on grounds later shown to be groundless. At the suggestion of the MBA Professionalism Committee, I commented at the MBA Annual Meeting that "At times of unrest and upheaval it is most important to honor the legal principles upon which this country was built, to respect the rights of others and avoid further victimizing those who have been wrongly accused. The end of perceived safety cannot justify the means of violating the rights of citizens. It is through the tyranny of small decisions that liberty is lost."

The Multnomah Bar Association increased its historic efforts in public outreach and working with judges and the Oregon State Bar to restore funding for the judicial branch. In addition, the MBA increased its efforts and organized a public outreach campaign coordinated with local judges and the bar.

Events of interest

I also served as representative for the MBA to Multnomah County Chair Diane Linn's Blue Ribbon Courthouse Committee beginning in 2002. This committee maintained work that had been going on for decades in an effort to upgrade or replace the existing Multnomah County Courthouse. We were able to convince the members of the Committee and the County Commission of the need to build a new courthouse and not simply attempt to refurbish the existing courthouse. Significant efforts were made with the MBA's active involvement and, although we have not achieved our final goal, we have gotten closer to the county's purchase of land in downtown Portland for the initial construction of a new courthouse.

Community service

At the beginning of my term in office, the MBA Board focused on an expansion of its public outreach efforts as part of its ongoing efforts as stewards of the justice system. The board held a supplemental retreat devoted to development of the public outreach effort. The board committed to an expenditure allowing the funds to retain a public relations consultant, and a public outreach program was devised with much volunteer help and implemented with the active participation of the Multnomah Circuit Court Judicial Outreach Committee. This resulted in the creation of public outreach messages and strategies. "The goal of the program is to increase public awareness and understanding the importance of a fair and impartial judicial system, its impact on our daily lives, and its value to the community." Three key messages were identified:

1. the importance of the rule of the law and a fair and impartial judicial system;
2. the need for adequate resources; and
3. the need for safe and efficient facilities.

The MBA became more effective in dealing with media and with the legislature and assisted the local judges in their efforts with local legislators.

MBA then versus now

When I came on the board in 1999, the MBA was in the process of completing a 10-year period of moving to a more professional, independent, and important fixture of the legal community and the greater community with respect to the issues involving lawyers, the legal system, and the judiciary.