

President's Corner



By Allen M. Terrell, Jr., Esquire

I am honored to be the President of the Delaware Bar Association. I have a long-standing appreciation for this organization and for the practice of law in Delaware.

My first contact with Delaware lawyers might illustrate why I am so fond of the Delaware Bar Association. After graduating from law school, I practiced with a firm in New York City. At first, life for a young couple was great in the Big Apple. But, after our first child arrived, the five story walk-up to our West Side apartment when coming home late at night from work reduced my enthusiasm for the City. I decided to investigate jobs in smaller cities.

Although my wife and I had never visited Wilmington, I thought it would be a city where I could achieve the work-life balance that I sought, without requiring me to sacrifice the legal practice that one normally finds in larger markets. In the fall of 1969 I interviewed at my current employer and at another large Wilmington law firm (*i.e.* almost 20 lawyers then). At each firm I was escorted to interviews by a junior associate. While the interviews at both firms were with renowned leaders of the Bar, I was most impressed with the friendly manner and enthusiastic attitude of the young associates at each firm. While I was interviewing at law firms, my current employer had arranged for my wife to be shown around Wilmington by a local real estate agent. At the end of the day, that law firm invited my wife and me for dinner with some of the senior members of the firm. When my wife and I got together that evening, I asked her how she liked Wilmington. She re-

sponded that she'd already seen a house in which she'd be happy. She asked me about the law firms and I told her that I liked them both very much. At the end of the evening I was extended an offer and soon accepted. Within a week after coming to Wilmington, each of the escorts at the two firms at which I had interviewed asked my wife and me to dinner. We became life-long friends. In a very personal sense the Delaware Bar has been a key part of my life since I arrived in Delaware.

When I was admitted to the Bar in 1970 it had 400 members. I remember going to the Delaware Supreme Court Building and being amazed to see on one wall all the members of the Delaware Bar since 1676. Today, there are over 4000 members. The year of my admission marked the beginning of what was described in the DSBA's book *The Delaware Bar in the 20th Century* as "a decade of growth, turbulence and change." By the end of that decade, the Bar had grown to over 1000, marking a 300% increase, an unprecedented growth at that time. One of the interesting changes was the impact on small and solo practices. Since the 1600s and until the mid-twentieth century, almost all Delaware lawyers worked solo or in small firms. In the 1970's, however, larger firms started to grow in all three counties. To quote *The Delaware Bar in the 20th Century* again: "During the 1970s the solo practitioner in Delaware became an endangered species, and the law firm became the norm."

Interestingly, solo practitioners did not become "an endangered species" in the next two decades. Throughout

the United States, the number of solo practitioners and small firms began to increase in the 1990s. Today, the majority of lawyers in private practice still work alone or in small firms. However, this trend may be reversing as increased competition and tough economic times are placing strains on maintaining a small law office.

The 1970s also marked a turning point in the number of female lawyers in the Delaware Bar. From 1676-1969 only 12 women were admitted to practice law in Delaware, all in the 20th Century. For the first 247 years, the Delaware Constitution forbade women from joining the Delaware Bar, until it was amended in 1923. Today women constitute about 40% of the Delaware Bar and their numbers in law schools are growing. Unfortunately, the growth in racial and ethnic diversity of the Delaware Bar has not been as dramatic. I am committed to increasing the diversity in our Bar that so enriches our lives. Furthermore, one of my highest goals as your President is for the Delaware Bar to retain its reputation as the most collegial and professional Bar in the country. ☺



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