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**LAW DAY CELEBRATION**  
GOVERNOR DAVID PATERSON  
AND CHIEF JUDGE JONATHAN  
LIPPMAN HEADED THIS  
YEAR'S CEREMONY.

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# NEW YORK STATE BAR ASSOCIATION State Bar News

## Michael Getnick: A presidential profile State Bar's duty is to protect all lawyers and the profession's future

By Patricia Sears Doherty

Leaders lead in many ways. Some lead loudly, always in motion, making their presence and their wishes known to all in broad, brash strokes. Michael Getnick, the next president of the State Bar, employs a simpler, more effective approach to leading—carefully weighing all sides of an issue, seeking advice from experts, bringing disparate groups together and helping them to work through difficulties toward an equitable solution. He usually does it with a smile and a bit of quiet, wry humor. And, he usually forges a consensus.

In the past few years, Getnick has become well-known as an active member of the Committee on Diversity and Leadership Development, and has continued to speak out and take part in the State Bar's programs that foster and promote the goals of expanding diversity and providing for leadership opportunities for all members and for those wishing to join the Association.

With his presidency, the State Bar's entire membership will benefit from the attention and devotion of its Quiet Leader. Case in point: Throughout his year as president-elect, Getnick has chaired the House of Delegates meetings in a calm manner, using his well-modulated voice to keep debates and discussions productive and timely, and cutting through any tensions with

well-placed humor or a gentlemanly remark.

Getnick will become the State Bar's 112<sup>th</sup> president on June 1, and it will be the capstone to his membership, which began in 1970, soon after he received his J.D. from Cornell Law School.

It could be said that the new president has the State Bar in his blood—he and his brother, Neil V. Getnick, followed in their father's footsteps, becoming attorneys and then joining the Association that had been so important to the senior Getnick's career. "My father was always involved in the NYSBA," said Getnick. The new president joined the Oneida County Bar Association and the State Bar upon earning his degree from Cornell Law School in 1969.

Now a partner in Getnick, Livingston, Atkinson, Gigliotti & Priore, LLP in Utica and of counsel to Getnick and Getnick in New York, he began his career as a legal aid trial attorney. "They were three of the best years of my legal life, because I was representing people who could not afford legal counsel, but needed a trial attorney." Prevailing in the racial balance case involving the City of Utica School System was a most meaningful experience.

He is still a trial attorney and concentrates his practice on insurance and personal injury law, corporate and



Michael Getnick

business law, appellate practice and litigation. Getnick entered private practice because he "saw the opportunity to engage in a wider scope of practice" and for the expanded opportunities in providing for his family. "I am so grateful to my wife for her support in my professional endeavors and her incredible role in raising our sons."

### Association opportunities

Getnick said he didn't plan to seek the presidency of the State Bar when he first became involved. "I wanted to

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## Stephen P. Younger new President-elect

By Brandon J. Vogel



Stephen P. Younger

When Stephen P. Younger speaks, people listen.

Whether it's a one-on-one discussion or addressing a large crowd, he commands attention and respect with his affable nature, outstanding knowledge on a variety of legal issues, and a razor-sharp focus.

These traits will serve Younger well as he becomes the State Bar's president-elect on June 1. In the next year, he will chair the House of Delegates and co-chair the President's Committee on Access to Justice. He certainly seems ready to tackle the challenges that lie ahead.

"This is a particularly important time for lawyers with the current economic crisis and its impact on the Association. In the upcoming year, I

will be looking for ways to help people adapt, such as lawyers who are in transition, and solo and small-firm practitioners who are facing difficult times," said Younger.

### The right fit

Even at an early age, Younger knew that a law career was his calling. "I enjoyed debate at both school and at home, which my mother will quickly tell you," said Younger. "It was always a field that interested me. From the start, I was attracted to the idea of helping other people."

After receiving a history degree from Harvard University *cum laude*, Younger spent two years working in the New York Unified Court System, where he saw a myriad of issues that

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# Legal Project receives 2009 Angelo T. Cometa Award

Albany organization provides services for domestic violence victims and children

By Brandon J. Vogel

President Bernice K. Leber and the chair of the State Bar's Committee on Lawyer Referral Service presented the Capital District Women's Bar Association Legal Project, Inc. ("The Legal Project") with the 2009 Angelo T. Cometa Award at the House of Delegates dinner on April 3.

The Legal Project, a private, non-profit organization, provides legal information and representation for battered women and their children in family court, and also provides civil legal services for the working poor.

## Critical resources

"Since its inception in 1995, The Legal Project has provided critical and creative resources for our working poor to obtain civil legal services so that domestic violence victims can live a better life," said Committee on Lawyer Referral Service Chair Rajpattie Persaud-Billette. "I am pleased to honor its continued excellence in helping vulnerable citizens receive the quality legal services they richly deserve."

Founded by the Capital District Women's Bar Association, The Legal Project began as a grassroots effort by a small group of women attorneys who recognized the need for legal information and representation for battered women seeking orders of



**2009 Angelo T. Cometa Award**—President Bernice K. Leber congratulates the Capital District Women's Bar Association Legal Project on receiving the 2009 Angelo T. Cometa Award, sponsored by the Committee on Lawyer Referral Service. The Legal Project received the award on April 3 at the Fort Orange Club in Albany. L to R: Ava Charne, executive director of the CDWBA; Jessica Lennon, practice manager of the Legal Project; Jill Dunn, past president of the CDWBA; Michelle Wildgrube, vice-president of the Legal Project Board, Leber, and Lisa Frisch, executive director of the Legal Project. [Photo by Sebrina Barrett]

protection, custody and support in Family Court. The Legal Project has grown to a staff of 12 and has a panel of more than 80 volunteer attorneys providing pro bono services for battered women and their children in Family Court and in matrimonial proceedings.

The Legal Project serves more than 1,600 low-income residents of the Capital District, including those who earn too much money to qualify for

indigent legal services programs, but who do not earn enough to pay the fees of a private attorney.

The Legal Project addresses the need for non-criminal legal services by providing innovative, cost-effective services that are collaborative in nature and focus on well-defined, but unmet needs in the community. Examples include its Bankruptcy & Credit program that provides free legal consultations and free or low-cost legal

representation to individuals and families struggling with financial problems and debt. Another service is the uncontested divorce clinics, providing document assistance to low-income individuals who are representing themselves in a divorce matter.

## About the award

The award is sponsored by the State Bar's Committee on Lawyer Referral Service and recognizes individuals or groups in New York demonstrating an extraordinary commitment toward advancing the goals of the Lawyer Referral and Information Service (LRIS). The State Bar's service assists members of the public in obtaining information about the availability of legal services and other agencies, increasing access to attorneys, and/or providing legal services to clients.

Past winners include Allen J. Charne of New York (New York City Bar) and past State Bar President Angelo T. Cometa of New York. Cometa chaired the Committee on Lawyer Referral Service during the first year of LRIS operation. As committee chair, Cometa was instrumental in establishing the LRIS and increasing public access to attorneys. The award was created in 2007 in recognition of his extraordinary service efforts. ♦

Vogel is NYSBA's Media Writer.

## Younger views participation in the State Bar as 'part of our obligation as lawyers'

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confirmed law was the right career for him. He later earned his law degree from Albany Law School, *magna cum laude*, where he was editor-in-chief of the Albany Law Review.

One of his first mentors, former State Bar secretary and Chief Administrative Judge Richard J. Bartlett, encouraged him to clerk for the Hon. Hugh R. Jones, then an associate judge on the New York State Court of Appeals and past president of the State Bar. Jones impressed on Younger that "serving in bar associations is not a choice, but is part of our obligation as lawyers."

Jones appointed Younger secretary of the Committee on Courts of Appellate Jurisdiction, beginning his road to leadership within the State Bar.

The State Bar's commitment to mentoring is just one reason that Younger values being a member, as well as "the ability to give back to the community as a whole." He thanked Past President Hon. Robert P.

Patterson, Jr. and Hon. Harold Tyler, Jr., both of whom were partners at Younger's firm, for helping to steer his career and encouraging bar association work.

"I am always struck by how lawyers help other lawyers. The interpersonal connections I have made through bar association work with lawyers from broad walks of life have been very valuable. You don't encounter that as much in your practice, particularly as a litigator, which is largely adversarial," said Younger. "I appreciate that the Association emphasizes mentoring and our obligation to mentor younger lawyers."

## Practice into action

Younger is a partner in Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler LLP in New York, where he is a leading commercial litigator and is well-known for his work in international arbitration.

He regularly represents financial institutions, mutual funds, hedge funds, pension funds and venture capital firms in commercial and securities

disputes. He also has developed an extensive practice representing Latin American companies.

Younger chaired the State Bar's Committee on Alternative Dispute Resolution (now the Dispute Resolution Section) from 1998 to 2000.

Thereafter, Younger chaired the Commercial and Federal Litigation Section from 2005 to 2006, and before that, the section's committees on Pro Bono and Securities Litigation, and its Long-Range Planning Task Force. He became the section's delegate to the House in 2006, which increased his involvement within the State Bar. This led to his 2007 appointment to the Executive Committee as a member-at-large.

Younger also is an active member of the Committee on Membership, where he co-chairs the President's Membership Challenge, which has increased the State Bar's membership almost 6 percent over the last two years.

## Life outside the bar

The father of four children, Younger is an avid sailor, which he describes as a "great way to get out of the office and away from the stress of a Blackberry." He also enjoys golf and "voraciously reading any newspaper that covers world events."

## Serving the state

In addition to his State Bar activities, Younger is counsel to the New York State Commission on Judicial Nomination, which nominates New York's Court of Appeals judges. He is a member of the First Department Judicial Screening Committee and serves on the advisory committee to the Commercial Division of the New York State Supreme Court.

He previously served as transition director for New York Attorney General Andrew W. Cuomo and as a member of former Chief Judge Judith S. Kaye's ADR Task Force. ♦

Vogel is NYSBA's Media Writer.