



Report on State Bar of Michigan Conference

I left a scorching hot Toronto and eventually got to a brisk (cold) Mackinac Island for the State Bar of Michigan Conference. OBA has been building an expanded relationship with the Michigan Bar.

The Island is in the northern part of the state and rather isolated. It cannot be reached by road. You have to take a boat.

That said the site is lovely. The first day began with a welcome reception with Janet Welch, executive director of the State Bar of Michigan. I brought regards from the OBA. The next day the formal program began.

There was a business meeting, similar to the OBA council meetings, in the morning. Because Michigan has a unified bar -- OBA and LSUC in one -- the business meeting dealt with some issues OBA would not normally deal with. However, what is striking is how the challenges facing the Michigan bar -- economics, pro bono, insurance, unauthorized practice and education -- are the challenges Ontario faces.



After the business meeting there were two parallel meetings -- a leadership program and a CLE program. The CLE program was locally based and a highlight of the local bar's calendar.

The leadership program focused on the challenges of blending volunteer time, busy practice and life balance. There was an extensive discussion of how to bring all stakeholders together to support a unified position that would be considered by government and the public. A point, known well to OBA, was the importance of not being seen as political or hostile to government (but the next day a very different position was taken). Professional associations must focus on their expertise and not on politics.

A major part of the program was a speech a discussion led by the Governor's spouse on leadership. The paradigm used was the 'family'. The importance of setting goals and bringing stakeholders onboard with those goals was closely considered.

There were workshops on getting stakeholders to buy into organizational goals. These took much of the afternoon of the first full day. During these workshops I was able to

speak with the incoming President and various staff at the SBM. I gave a small gift to each of the Executive Director and the President. They were delighted at clearly unexpected gifts.

The evening featured a reception which was an excellent opportunity to meet Michigan lawyers and network. I was delighted at how open and friendly Michigan lawyers were to meet me. They genuinely seemed touched that OBA was represented.

The final day began with a lengthy presentation about the Michigan Bar's Representative Assembly. The Representative Assembly, because Michigan has a unified bar, is something of a combination of the Benchers and OBA Council. In addition the Representative Assembly (presumably by subcommittees) makes the first drafts of most procedural regulations and court rules in Michigan. Members of the Representative Assembly meet usually only once a year in full assembly but, of course, smaller subgroups meet far more frequently on matters such as discipline. Members can serve two three year terms.

Following the discussion about the Representative Assembly there was a discussion of dealing with the media. Elements of media training were set out.

Somewhat surprisingly to me there was a presentation on upcoming elections in Michigan. The discussion was fairly specific; perhaps this is because Michigan judges are elected. I gather the Michigan Bar takes specific election positions and campaigns on these. Obviously this is very different from Ontario.

The program ended with a discussion of strategic planning and how to grow membership and a focus on what lawyers are looking for from their bar association.

I thanked the State Bar of Michigan for inviting the OBA to attend. Their next meeting is September in Dearborn and I am confident OBA will attend.

James Morton