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L.A. Bar President Aims to Boost Visibility

By Susan McRae
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LOS ANGELES — As the economic fallout in the legal industry brings attention to the emergence of solo and small firm practices, it seems fitting that Alan K. Steinbrecher has become the Los Angeles County Bar Association's newest president.

Steinbrecher, 64, launched his own boutique firm five years ago, after a 28-year career at Paul, Hastings, Janofsky & Walker, where he headed its litigation department.

While he said the timing of his ascendancy to bar president is purely coincidental, he acknowledged the climate is ripe with opportunity for small firms.

"Large firms are terrific," Steinbrecher said. "They do what they do very well. But there's an awful lot of business in this town that needs legal representation and lot of different parts of this community that need legal representation, and the small- and medium-size firms can really provide a lot of that service very well."

Noting the legal market's changing demographics, he said 60 percent of the association's membership now comes from solo and small firm practitioners.

"Some people call this a middle-market legal town, and I think there's a lot of accuracy in that," Steinbrecher said. "We don't have as many large corporations headquartered here as we used to. But there's an economic vibrancy here and a lot of small [businesses] on the cutting edge ... that haven't matured and grown to Fortune 500 size, yet."

Heading Steinbrecher's list of priorities in the coming year is raising the bar's visibility so lawyers, the business community and the general public become more aware of its many services.

To broaden its reach and adjust to the changing legal landscape, the 25,000-member bar association is redesigning its website and increasing its presence on Fa-



Susan McRae / Daily Journal

Alan K. Steinbrecher, president of the Los Angeles County Bar Association.

cebook and other social networking sites. It also has begun offering discounted health insurance packages for solo and small firm practitioners, along with its other available insurance options. And it has started a special section for senior lawyers, who may be leaving their firms and looking to transition into other fields.

In addition, the barristers' section of younger lawyers has put on several programs to address the changing job market and lack of opportunities. The bar also recently held a conference for solo and small firms that offered useful information on starting and managing a practice.

The changes come at a time when the association has moved to larger quarters in downtown Los Angeles, brought on a new executive director, Sally Suchil, previously

director of corporate and legal affairs for Los Angeles' Hammer Museum, and hired a communications specialist to further increase its visibility.

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ALAN K. STEINBRECHER
LOS ANGELES COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION

Also topping this year's agenda are the association's finances. Steinbrecher said he will continue to closely monitor the \$14 million budget to ensure the association is achieving maximum benefit for money spent. Like most organizations, the bar has felt the effects of the recession. Membership has declined, along with income from sources including dues, programs and seminars, grants, fundraising and what's called "affinity partnerships" with large companies. But things are looking up. The hiring freeze on the association's 90 staff positions has been downgraded to a "hiring slowdown," Steinbrecher said, although

salaries and retirement contributions remain stagnant.

Don Mike Anthony, the immediate past president, spent the better part of his tenure grappling with the association's finances and lending support to efforts of Presiding Judge Charles W. "Tim" McCoy Jr. to avoid layoffs at the Los Angeles County Superior Court. During that time, he said, he worked closely with Steinbrecher.

"I didn't do anything seriously without first checking with him," said Anthony, who practices family law at Hahn & Hahn in Pasadena. "We worked on technology and came up with a new content and management system. Alan is taking that and going forward."

In his president's message after taking the helm in June, Steinbrecher said too often members aren't sure why they belong

to the association or what it does. That never was an issue for him. A Duke University School of Law graduate, Steinbrecher joined the County Bar in 1977, on arriving in Los Angeles and becoming a lawyer at Paul Hastings. He was encouraged to do so by one of the firm's founding partners, Leonard Janofsky, a former county and State Bar president, who later headed the American Bar Association. The firm had a culture of participation in the community, Steinbrecher said, and he has tried to carry that message ever since.

"There are attorneys who belong because they belonged last year and the year before, and are not sure what they are getting out of it," Steinbrecher said. "They just always thought being member of the local bar association was an appropriate thing to do.

"I agree it's the right thing to do. But it's

our job to make sure they understand all the services and advantages we provide for them on one hand, and also all the things we are doing beneficially in the community."

Those services include the association's dispute resolution clinic, legal counseling programs on AIDS and HIV issues, and immigration and domestic violence programs in the courts.

"We want to make sure our members know all of that so they have a good picture of what it means to be a member of the bar association," Steinbrecher said. "Beyond that, we would like to appeal to any attorneys in Los Angeles County who aren't members to make sure they know all of those things so they would be inclined to say, 'That's an organization I want to belong to.'"