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60TH STATE BAR PRESIDENT
SARAH B. "SALLY" AKINS

A Renewed Commitment to Professionalism



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Two and a half years ago, COVID-19 took an unprecedented toll on the delivery of justice in our state, and although things are almost fully back to normal now, the effects are still being felt. Two months ago, just before I took office, unauthorized access to the State Bar’s network caused an interruption to some of the means of communication and services to our members.

Our Bar leaders and staff have had to rise to a number of major challenges and make the best of difficult situations over the years. Simply put, we have learned to expect the unexpected, and the 2022-23 Bar year will be no different.

While staying prepared for whatever may come our way over the next 12 months, I am committed to focusing on the core values of our profession and our ongoing mission to serve the public and the justice system. This includes a renewed commitment to professionalism among the members of the State Bar of Georgia.

Active Bar members know the importance of professionalism. Every day, in every area of law practice, we see first-hand examples of attorney professionalism or, hopefully only on rare occasions, a lack thereof.

The Chief Justice’s Commission on Professionalism, the first body of its kind in the nation, was created in 1989 by the Supreme Court of Georgia with the primary charge of enhancing professional-

ism among Georgia’s lawyers. In part, its purpose is to ensure that the practice of law remains a high calling, enlisted in the service of client and public good. Composed of representatives of the organized bar, practicing bar, judiciary, law schools and the public, the commission serves as the institutional framework for sustaining an environment that fosters professionalism in the legal community.

For Georgia lawyers, two documents—our Lawyer’s Creed and Aspirational Statement—represent higher standards of lawyer behavior than the minimal standards set forth in the Code of Professional Conduct and reflect the understanding that lawyers have relationships with clients, opposing parties and their counsel, the courts, colleagues, the profession and the public.

The aspirational goals bind Bar members together as a community. The mission statement of the Chief Justice’s Commission on Professionalism summarizes our duty to “exercise the highest levels of professional integrity in their relationships with (our) clients, other lawyers, the courts and the public to fulfill (our) obligations to improve the law and the legal system and to ensure access to that system.”

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has in many ways made lawyers’ jobs (and lives) more difficult and caused frustration and strained professional relationships. But in other ways, it has reinforced

OFFICERS' BLOCK

The State Bar of Georgia's eight officers are elected to a one-year term by the membership and serve as members of the Executive Committee. Three of the officer positions are held by the president, president-elect and immediate past president of the YLD, shown on page 11.

the idea that we are all in this together and even in adversarial situations resulted in better understanding and increased civility among opposing parties.

My hope is that as we enter a new phase of the COVID-19 era we can reinforce our commitment to conducting ourselves in a professional manner. It's actually something we should resolve to do every year.

Just before our Annual Meeting in June, the Bar mourned the tragic and very untimely passing of Jeff Ward, my colleague at Miles Mediation in Savannah and friend to so many of his fellow Georgia lawyers through his various positions of service and leadership. This unbearable loss brought to mind several things: Life is short. Life is fragile. Life is unpredictable. And sometimes life is *too* short. It can be cut short when we least expect it. Reflecting on Jeff's life and career, I am asking you to join me in pledging a renewed commitment to civility and professionalism not only to our colleagues, but also—and most especially—to our adversaries.

As the late Justice P. Harris Hines used to say and, more importantly, to embody is, "Be kind." Be kind. It's not hard. Let's be kind to our colleagues and friends. Let's be kind to our families and neighbors. Let's be kind to our perceived enemies, our adversaries, those on the other side with whom we're perhaps not getting along. Maybe pause for a second



SARAH B. "SALLY" AKINS

President

Akins is a full-time mediator at Miles Mediation & Arbitration, where she mediates every type of civil case. She is also of counsel with Ellis Painter in Savannah.



HON. J. ANTONIO "TONY" DELCAMPO

President-Elect

DelCampo, of DelCampo Grayson Lopez in Atlanta, focuses his law practice in the areas of personal injury, medical malpractice, trucking accidents, premises liability and business disputes. He is also a mediator/arbitrator with Henning Mediation and Arbitration.



IVY N. CADLE

Treasurer

Cadle, of Baker Donelson in Macon and Atlanta, is a real estate litigator who advocates for property rights in the areas of eminent domain, land use, title, zoning, conservation easements and commercial lending litigation. He is also a certified public accountant and mediator.



CHRISTOPHER P. TWYMAN

Secretary

Twyman, of Cox Byington Twyman LLP in Rome, practices in the areas of commercial and general business litigation, banking law, education and school law, and criminal defense.



ELIZABETH L. FITE

Immediate Past President

Fite, of Kutak Rock LLP in Atlanta, is a business litigator and trial attorney with significant experience handling complex business, personal injury and wrongful death lawsuits, and has previously represented DeKalb County in public safety matters.



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before you hit “send” on the email. And what I really started thinking about was this: You never know when it might be your last chance to be kind to that person or even when it could be the last thing on this Earth. Let’s try to conduct ourselves in a way where there is no fear that we will regret our last words to anyone. That’s what I ask of you, my fellow Bar members, and I think that will be a beautiful tribute not only to Jeff Ward, but also to all those who have gone before—perhaps when they didn’t realize it was their time.

A commitment to professionalism is one of the foremost principles of our State Bar. I would like to close with these words from then Georgia Bar Association President Holcombe Perry in 1963, when he was making the case for a unified State Bar:

“It has been pointed out that in relation with the public the Bar has always been and always will be a unit,” Mr. Perry said. “The actions and sayings of one lawyer reflect credit or discredit on the rest of his professional brethren in the eyes of the public. The interests of

all lawyers are inextricably woven together. Through such an organization, with all lawyers participating, we will come to have a better appreciation of the fact that we are all members of a great and honorable profession of which we should be proud, a more adequate understanding of our mutual problems, a keener knowledge of our faults and

our virtues, with a mutual determination to eliminate the former and preserve and enhance the latter; and finally we will have the opportunity of establishing among ourselves a sense of brotherhood, mutual respect and trust and through all of this to strive diligently to improve the administration of justice in our state.” ●



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