

Farewell but not goodbye

By Douglas K. Sheff, Massachusetts Bar Association President

When I became president of the Massachusetts Bar Association last September, I promised myself that I would do everything I could to leave the MBA better than I found it. I knew that was going to be a tough task, given the MBA's long list of illustrious predecessors. Eleven months later, however, I truly believe we *are* better. Just look at the ways we've grown as an association.

We've expanded our influence through efforts, like our "12 for 12" program. Through this unique initiative, we united lawyers and the general public, with one voice, and drew greater attention to the need for proper funding for our courts and civil legal aid. We also used our voice in the legislature to support workers and their families in Massachusetts. The MBA's efforts this year helped push through a new Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights and a law that increases the burial benefit under the workers' compensation statute.

Our advocacy also expanded the MBA's name beyond The Commonwealth's borders. We received national recognition for our Workplace Safety Task Force, which earned an award from a renowned national workers' advocacy group. The task force was hailed as a model, which is currently being replicated in many states around the country. Having spearheaded the Workers' Right to Know Law, the task force is now helping to enforce its measures, which guarantee safety and fair wages to 100,000 workers each year.

More recently, the MBA's enhanced influence was felt when the One Fund announced its protocol for a second distribution of charitable funds. Thanks, in part, to our public support for individuals suffering from invisible injuries, like traumatic brain injury, marathon survivors with these devastating injuries are now more clearly eligible to receive the meaningful awards they need. Our efforts regarding marathon victims helped to inspire our new Traumatic Brain Injury Task Force, which will address issues regarding the thousands in Massachusetts who suffer a TBI each year.

During this past year we've also expanded some of our most important relationships, especially those with judges, with whom we now meet regularly. From formal bench-bar symposiums to guest speakers at our House of Delegates to more informal brown bag lunches, the MBA has strengthened ties between lawyers and judges like never before. I am personally excited to see this now regular interaction continue under new Supreme Judicial Court Chief, Justice Ralph D. Gants, who has partnered with us on so many important issues. We are also working to set up more events with our wonderful clerks, who keep our courts running smoothly.

I've spoken at length about improving the public perception of lawyers, and we made great strides in this area, including more active outreach and interaction with the media. We spread the word about the positive contributions of lawyers on TV, radio and print through coverage of our work with marathon victims, our Blue Ribbon Commission's report on the woeful salaries paid to ADAs, public defenders and bar advocates, and many other important stories. The press now frequently calls upon MBA officers and

other leaders for legal expertise, and the MBA is now recognized as *the* place to go for legal commentary.

In addition to these accomplishments, we've grown as an organization this year. Our membership is expanding, and we're especially excited at the influx of new attorneys, many of whom joined after taking our Practicing with Professionalism Course — a great new addition to our educational offerings. Adding to our successful community programs like Dial-A-Lawyer and Tiered Community Mentoring, we also found new ways to represent the underrepresented. MBA volunteers helped feed 600 families at a Thanksgiving food drive, and we provided financial support to an innovative program started by lawyers to house the homeless at the Pine Street Inn.

Of course, I've also grown during my time as president in ways I could not have imagined. I am the son of a trial attorney who practiced since the fifties. My father and mentor, Irving "Chick" Sheff, taught me that the legal community can be like an extended family. After this year, I truly feel closer to this family than ever before. I am so grateful for my fellow officers, the MBA staff and the volunteers I've come to know so well during this time. Any success we've had is due to the partnership and friendship we've shared together.

As I sign off one final time, I can say with confidence that the MBA is poised for even greater success next year under the leadership of my good friend, and your next MBA president, Marsha V. Kazarosian. You won't find a better lawyer or a better leader — and she is about to inherit an incredible family.

Presidents come and go. But the MBA's excellence and integrity is forever. The beauty of the MBA is we don't "start over" after each president. In fact, we never stop. Through our committees, programs and committed leaders, the MBA has the pieces in place to ensure continuity and flourish for years to come. And I'll be there to continue working with the officers and staff on a number of projects in order to support the MBA.

I am proud to have led such an incredible organization this year, and I am grateful for all of your trust and support. I'll say farewell, for now, but not goodbye.