

NCBA TO ME

IT'S MORE THAN A MEMBERSHIP



FINDING MY PROFESSIONAL HOME

By: Hon. Harry L. Powazek (Ret.)

Today, I am a proud member of the North County Bar Association, but I was not always aware of what a truly unique organization it is. I believe that some background is necessary to provide context for my story:

I was selected as a Family Law Commissioner in 1995 and was assigned to the Central Judicial District for a short period of time. At my request, I was then reassigned to the East County Judicial District to assist in the family law department there. During my time in East County, I was very happy in that gas was cheap, there was a great Greek restaurant, and I had the honor of serving on a rotating basis with Judges Sturgeon and Goldsmith.

After approximately 13 months, I received an unanticipated telephone call from my Supervising Family Law Judge suggesting that we meet to discuss a new development. As I'm sure you can appreciate, receiving a call from my Supervising Judge made me somewhat anxious, and I was afraid it might be a bad omen.

During our meeting, I was informed that I was going to be reassigned to the North County Family Judicial District immediately. Given the fact that I was very happy in East County, I responded that given my rather strong personality as well as the strong reputation of the North County Family Law Bar at the time, this would not be a good fit. I was then a commissioner and required a stipulation to preside over their matters. Given these dynamics, I thought the likelihood of stipulations would be minimal. I was informed that this issue had been discussed and the Bar still wanted me, so I had no choice in the matter.

Begrudgingly, I packed my briefcase and bid farewell to the lunches of moussaka and gyros, to which I had grown rather accustomed, and made my way up the long road to North County.

It took a while to adjust to the atmosphere in Vista, but boy, am I glad that the Bar wanted me. I spent the next 25 years or so in North County in a variety of assignments but primarily in Family Law. This is when my involvement began with the North County Bar Association. And this is when I realized they were not a typical bar association, but instead truly nurtured an atmosphere that naturally led to active involvement by practitioners and judicial officers alike.

This bar was proactively supporting fellow attorneys, engaging with the Bench, and providing real and practical assistance to the community. At that time, the bar and its members were instrumental in setting the majority of cases on settlement conference calendars so that matters could get reasonable trial dates. This made such a practical difference in the efficiency of case management, and was a huge help to the court.

I have a vivid memory meeting with the members of the Family Law Section of the Bar and mentioning that I thought a monthly Brown Bag seminar might be a good idea. Shortly afterwards, I was informed that they would be held in my department, and I was given a schedule with anticipated topics!

Each legal section of the Bar association is active in providing either in-person or virtual MCLE seminars on relevant topics that are always stimulating and thought-provoking. I am struck by the level of commitment of the NCBA members – it is not just the same people presenting or showing up at events like it can be with some other bar associations. And the diversity of events seems to have something for everyone.



This season, planned events include Law Day, a free legal clinic which directly impacts the community by offering a free legal clinic comprised of our volunteer members, May Faire, the annual mixer where our different bar associations come together to learn about the other groups and how they are working in the county, the popular Bench-Bar Awards dinner, a pickleball tournament, a golf tournament, and the Youth in Court and On My Honor programs, where our members work together with local schools to teach our younger population about legal responsibility and the court system.

The programs and events of the North County Bar have given me the opportunity over these many years to observe the effectiveness of the Bar Association and allowed me to witness the professional and personal growth of our members, as well as even some of their children. (Have I really been around that long?)

Something really special about this bar that sets it apart from other bar associations is the close relationship shared by the bar and the bench. Our judicial officers attend the monthly dinners and participate in the programs, allowing them to get to know practitioners on a more personal level. This interaction truly serves to make the association stronger as a whole and allows us all to contribute to the greater effect this has on our community. As a retired Judge and current mediator, I had some more time (not as much as I thought I would!), so I decided to join the Board of Directors, to help steer and govern our bar. This has allowed me to see first-hand the dedication that so many folks have to keeping the NCBA running smoothly and being productive.

For anyone who hasn't been out to the NCBA dinners or other events lately, you are doing yourself a disservice. Come out and see us! There is such a welcoming atmosphere, and I always enjoy seeing new members and old members meeting and talking at the monthly dinners, practitioners learning from each other at MCLE presentations, and the feeling of camaraderie that exists.

Hon. Harry L. Powazek (Ret.) is a mediator at Signature Resolution Group. His deep understanding of the complexities and nuances of family law matters positions him to navigate the most challenging cases with grace and fairness, continuing to balance excellence with compassion. He can be reached at hpowazek@signatureresolution.com or by calling signature at (866) 208-5359.

