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# NEW YORK STATE BAR ASSOCIATION State Bar News

## New president a change agent on a mission Glenn Lau-Kee first Asian-American to lead Association

By Patricia Sears Doherty

Glenn Lau-Kee enters a room seemingly in perpetual motion. Papers fly over desks. Staff jump around him. The air itself seems to move.

Yet, there is a stillness about him. He shakes your hand. He smiles. "How are you?" he asks.

And he really does want to hear the answer.

That combination of energy and calm demeanor, joined with a natural sincerity, will stand Lau-Kee in good stead as he takes the reins of the State Bar presidency on June 1.

Lau-Kee's ability to get things done while seeming to be in constant motion is best illustrated in the way the interview for this article was conducted. That is, over the course of a week, in a few brief sit-down meetings, by email, but mostly in moments stolen in corners of rooms where other events and meetings were happening.

As president-elect, Lau-Kee's chairmanship of the House of Delegates during the past year's debates about legal education, the next generation of lawyers, the future of the profession and the highly-charged issue of mandatory pro bono reporting has been interesting, and challenging.

He has worked side-by-side with President David Schraven on all of those issues. Lau-Kee has traveled upstate and down, attending hearings, meetings and programs, sometimes participating, always listening. He has made those discussions an integral part of his own presidential priorities for the next year. "Connecting the Generations" will be his presidential theme, with adjacent themes being "Law Schools—Pathways to the Profession," and "Changing Demographics."

"I see my year as president as a natural continuation of what we have been doing with Dave (Schraver)," said Lau-Kee. "We should be bringing law schools and bar associations to the same table."

"Current lawyers are going to have to change," he said. "The point is, we are going to have to address the demographic shift we are seeing in the profession and understand it."

Lau-Kee is uniquely positioned to lead those discussions, partially because of his experience overseas and as an Asian-American.



**Perpetual motion**—Incoming President Glenn Lau-Kee strikes a rare still pose while attending the Executive Committee meeting in Rochester in April. [Photo by Greg Francis]

After receiving his undergraduate degree from Yale University and earning his J.D. from Boston University School of Law, Lau-Kee's first job as an associate was in the Hong Kong office of Coudert Brothers. He worked on bank financings for the construction of oil tankers and bulk carrier vessels and project loan financings in various Asian countries.

His world view is still influenced by the isolation that American lawyers overseas experienced back then. "Now, law firms are much more in touch" with their foreign offices through technology and social media.

### Coming home

Lau-Kee does not remember making a "conscious decision" to return to the New York legal community and his father's law firms: first, Koo Larrabee Lau-Kee & Lane LLP in White Plains and now, Kee & Lau-Kee in Chinatown, where the family lived until Lau-Kee was 10 years old.

His father, Norman L. Kee, 86, is still practicing. "But, not on Fridays," said the son, laughing.

"I came back more because of circumstances and always that unspoken question," he said. "You know: 'When are you going to join me?'" More laughter. Father and son are well respected and active in New York's Asian-American and legal communities. In 2010, they shared the Hon. George

Bundy Smith Pioneer Award, sponsored by the State Bar's Commercial and Federal Litigation Section.

While each is his own man—or lawyer—the mentoring the son has received from the father has been a lesson well learned. He said one of his presidential "sub-goals" is to foster more mentoring among the State Bar's established lawyers and the young members just beginning to make their marks.

"Mentoring is a very personal thing. Technology may be a time saver, but you really need that one-to-one, that personal contact, particularly when guidance is needed," he said.

Younger lawyers do not necessarily need guidance on lawyerly mechanisms, he said. "The lawyer's most important asset is his or her sense of judgment. You are constantly improving and refining it," Lau-Kee said.

"That broad view, that's why participating in bar associations is good. That's where lawyers learn how the world works and how to work with people," said the former co-chair of the Membership Committee, the first diversity member-at-large on the Executive Committee and member of the Diversity and Leadership Development Committee.

"That's why your work in bar associations is so important. The possibilities are there."

An important fact that State Bar members understand, he said, is that "not all lawyers are just lawyers. Each segment of the profession has separate and concrete needs." It will take "a lot of work and focus" by the State Bar on the needs and wants of the various segments of members and potential members for membership to remain a viable choice for lawyers.

Lau-Kee has great appreciation for lawyers, especially the younger generation of lawyers, who work in small and solo firms. By their size, they must operate in much the same way as general practice firms—without the collegiality found in larger firms.

"That sense of judgment, then, is not an easy thing to have when you are on your own," said Lau-Kee. The fact that so many young lawyers are forced to build solo practices is "another reason why mentoring is so important."

"It is a long process, and a process that keeps changing," said Lau-Kee. "It is my job to meet people and to listen; to look at where the Bar Association can be improved in how we do things."

### Family man

Lau-Kee and his wife, Rita Eng, an architect, have been married for 23 years. They have two daughters, Kelly and Kenzie. Kelly graduated from Carnegie Mellon University last year with degrees in industrial design and human computer interaction. She works for YouTube in San Francisco. Kenzie is a sophomore at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications and the Whitman School of Management at Syracuse University. ♦

Sears Doherty is State Bar News editor.



**Chief advocate**—President-elect Glenn Lau-Kee discusses why it is so important that experienced lawyers mentor younger colleagues and how belonging to the State Bar enhances that best practice.

[Photo by Brandon Vogel]