WWW.ACREL.ORG

A TOUR OF THE AMERICAN COLLEGE OF REAL ESTATE LAWYERS WEBSITE

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The Website for the American College of Real Estate Lawyers is now operational. Its “URL” is www.acrel.org. The following describes, in summary fashion, the most important features of the ACREL Website.

Accessing the Website

To access a website, one needs a computer with modem, and an Internet provider service. The Internet provider service can be a national company, such as American On-Line (AOL), or a local provider. We strongly suggest a minimum modem speed of 28,800 bps; otherwise, some features of the Website will take a significant amount of time to load. The new 56Kbps modems are very fast, but you must be sure that the model you select is compatible with your Internet Service Provider. The standards for 56Kbps have only recently been agreed upon, and most providers do not yet support both the ‘X2’ and ‘Flex’ systems.

Once you have connected to the Internet, just type in www.acrel.org in the appropriate part of your Internet Browser to go to the ACREL Website. Please note that the ACREL web extension is “org”, not “com”, because “org” is normally used for non-profit organizations whereas “com” is designated for commercial users. You can also enter the site on the “Favorites” or “Bookmark” file of your Internet browser. Once you have done this, you can then access it in the future with a single click.
The Website

The ACREL Website has two main sections, a “Public” Home Page (see Attachment 1) and a “Private” Home Page (see Attachment 2). The “Public” Home Page can be accessed by anyone who has access to the Internet. The “Private” Home Page is available only to Members of ACREL, and can only be accessed only by someone who enters an appropriate identification name and password.

So as to help a Member to immediately recognize whether the Member is in the Public or Private area of the ACREL Website, different backgrounds have been utilized. The Public pages of the Website all have a textured off-white background. The Private pages of the Website all have a plain white background. The exception to this is the Member information page, which in both sections has a gray background.

The Public Home Page

The Public Home Page has five main sections: ACREL Goals, Member Roster, What’s New, Internet Links and Private Home Page.

ACREL Goals

The goals of ACREL, as adopted by the College, are reprinted, in summarized form, so as to provide general information about the College to anyone who accesses the ACREL Public Home Page (see Attachment 3). In the future, it is possible that more information will be added about the College so that, if desired by the College, its profile can be raised.
Member Roster (Public)

The Member Roster section of the ACREL Public Home Page provides a vehicle for anyone who accesses the ACREL Website to identify and find out information about one or more Members of ACREL (see Attachment 4). The Members are searchable by their name or “official” nickname, law firm name, phonetic spelling of the last name, city or state. The Members database also is searchable for Officers of ACREL and for members of the Board of Governors. It is hoped that this tool will serve a purpose, for non-lawyers and lawyers both, similar to how Martindale Hubbell is utilized by lawyers.

The information contained in the Public section of the Member Roster is the “business only” information about the Member (see, e.g., Attachment 5). That is to say, it shows only the Member’s name, law firm, business address, business telephone, telex, business fax and e-mail address (which is hot linked for e-mail messages to the Member). As will be discussed later, “personal information” (such as home telephone and spouse’s name) about each Member is available in the Private Home Page section of the Website, which is only accessible to ACREL Members.

It is anticipated that the Member information will be updated monthly by the ACREL office, so that the current addresses, phone numbers and law firm affiliations of Members will be more quickly available to the College.

What’s New (Public)

The “What’s New” section of the Public Home Page of the Website (see Attachment 6) is planned as an area where the College can post information of interest to the general public,
particularly about real estate developments or other interesting real estate oriented websites, but also, perhaps, about College activities that may be of general interest.

**Internet Links (Public)**

The “Internet Links” section of the Public Home Page contains a variety of websites that the Technology Committee believes would be of interest to members of the public at large who have an interest in real estate. The selected sites, which may change from time to time, are broken down into seven general categories: commercial real estate industry websites, directories and reference tools websites, general interest websites, government sites websites, legal associations websites, legal research and educational sites, and real estate journals and information (see Attachment 7). The sites listed are “hot linked”, so that clicking on one takes the user directly to the site.

**Other Features (Public)**

The Public Home Page also has a “hot” e-mail address for sending e-mail to the College. In addition, as indicated above, to facilitate communication with Members, e-mail hot links to Members will be provided for all Members who advise the College of their e-mail address. There is also an e-mail hot link for e-mail to the College office on the Public Home Page.

Although the Public Home Page shows a heading for the Private Home Page, only a Member will be able to access it, and only after the Member enters the Member’s identification and password.
**Private Home Page**

For security and privacy reasons, the Private Home Page is accessible only by Members of the College. Each Member has been assigned a unique password by the College office. Once the Member logs on to the ACREL Website, the Member is free to change his or her password. However, if a Member changes the Member’s password and the Member then forgets the new password, it may take some period of time to establish a new password for that Member, since the company that manages our Website is the only one who can override a Member’s password to establish a new one.

The Private Home Page contains nine substantive sections. They are: Search ACREL Site, What’s New (Private), Meetings Calendar, Membership Roster, Committees, Forums, Internet Links, Publications and Public Home Page (see Attachment 8).

**Search ACREL Site (Private)**

The Search ACREL Site features allows a Member to conduct a search of the entire ACREL database (see Attachment 9). The search can be for anything on the ACREL Website, including, for example, a search to find articles on a topic, to find approximately when something was written, or to find what a particular Member has authored for the College. This feature operates much like most Internet searches, and in fact uses the Alta Vista search engine. You may enter a name or a term, and should quickly receive a list of places on the Site where it may be found, and which you may then access by clicking on the item. There is also an ‘Advanced Search’ alternative, which includes Boolean options (such as ‘and’, ‘or’, ‘not’, etc.) and other choices (see Attachments 10 and 11). However, the amount of data on the site is still small.
enough that the regular Search should suffice. You may find some redundant entries. This is an artifact of our database, which enters information in multiple locations, and which we hope will be only mildly inconvenient.

**What’s New (Private)**

The “What’s New (Private)” section of the Private Home Page (see Attachment 12) is intended to allow information to be posted for Members that would not be generally available to non-Members. It might include anything from a listing of new Members admitted to the College, to recent real estate developments to watch out for, to interesting information about Members. In addition, the “What’s New” section also will contain a listing of new or possibly interesting Internet links that have been added to the Internet Link Section. The What’s New section of the Private Home Page can also be utilized to alert Members as to when the listing of articles or other materials has been updated, or what has been added to the listing.

**Meetings Calendar (Private)**

The Meetings Calendar section of the Private Home Page provides information about the next several meetings of the College (see Attachment 13). It will contain information as to the date, location and theme of the program. In addition, under the “Further Information” section of each meeting, one can obtain electronic information about the locality in which the meeting will be held, including hotel information, if available, links to other helpful websites, and other relevant information (see Attachment 14).
Membership Roster (Private)

The Member Roster section on the Private Home Page works much like the Member Roster section of the Public Home Page, including allowing phonetic spelling last name searching (see Attachment 15). In the Private Member Roster section, however, the information about a Member is as complete as the information in the College Handbook, including e-mail hot links to those Members who have provided the College with their e-mail address. Thus, all personal information about a Member that is in the College Handbook also will be available in the Private Membership Roster section. In addition, the Member’s photograph, if in the Handbook, will also be in the Private section (see Attachment 16).

It is in the Private Membership Roster section where there is a feature that allows a Member to change the Member’s password.

Committees (Private)

The “Committees” section of the Private Home Page of our Website allows a Member to obtain a listing of all Members of a particular ACREL committee (see Attachment 17). Within a particular Committee, the Chair, Co-Chair or Vice-Chair are listed first, then the Board of Governor’s liaison, and then the balance of the Committee Members alphabetically (see Attachment 18). If one double-clicks on a particular Committee Member, one is then taken to the information about that Committee Member that would be found in the Handbook. If a Member has given the College the Member’s e-mail address, then there will also be a hot link to that Member for purposes of sending e-mail to that Member.
Forums (Private)

The Forums section provides bulletin boards for committees, and the College as a whole, to discuss issues and conduct committee work. These will operate in the same manner as the bulletin boards many of us are familiar with from services such as CompuServe and AOL. Each committee chair can serve as or designate a forum administrator to manage and supervise the forum. Any committee chair who wishes to create a forum for his or her committee should notify Jill Pace, our webmaster.

Users can browse through the forums and add their own comments (see Attachment 19). Forum users are also free to create new topics within a forum. Forums should prove to be a convenient, and therefore powerful, tool for our geographically disparate membership to work together on College activities. The forums are not, however, ‘live’ chat rooms (see “The Future”, below).

Internet Links (Private)

The “Internet Links” section of the Private Home Page is structured in the same way as the Public site, but may contain a larger collection of links (see Attachment 20).

Publications (Private)

The ACREL Publications section of the Private Home Page provides College Members, for the first time, with a database listing of all seminar materials and articles since 1982 (see Attachment 21). In addition, we are in the process of adding brief summaries for each of the materials since, in many instances, the titles of the materials may be eye catching, but not descriptive. These materials are searchable by title, date, author and, as the summaries are added,
by general topic (see Attachment 22). The index of materials may also be sorted by title, author
or date.

Unfortunately, the complete materials are not located on the ACREL Website, since they
were not preserved or, in some cases, even prepared, in electronic format. Also, even as
materials become available, in some instances the Publications Committee may withhold
publication on the Website because of the desire to publish the materials in some other format,
such as the ACREL Papers. It is hoped that, from this point forward, all materials submitted to
the College will be submitted in electronic format so that, if approved by the Publications
Committee, entire articles ultimately can be located on the Website. At this point, however,
based upon the summary information that will be available on the Website, it is hoped that by
contacting either the author or the ACREL office, a Member will be able to obtain further
information about the article or material and, perhaps, even a copy of the material.

The Publications section also will include, on a going forward basis, the substantive
portions of all Newsletter legal articles (see Attachment 23). Once again, unfortunately, the
historic Newsletter articles were not preserved in electronic format. The titles to all substantive
articles of all Newsletters dating back to 1982 are, however, searchable by date, author and title
(see Attachment 24). In the future, the complete text of all substantive Newsletter articles will be
added to our Website a few weeks after the Newsletter in which they appear has been published.

The Publications section of the Private Home Page also has an electronic form that can be
utilized to request a copy of an article from the ACREL office, if it is available (see Attachment
25).
Our policies regarding where, when and how to publish materials are the subject of ongoing discussion within the College. They will undoubtedly evolve over time.

Public Home Page

The “Public Home Page” section of the Private Home Page merely gives direct access to the Public Home Page for ACREL Members. Generally speaking, it is not thought that an ACREL Member will be accessing the Public Home Page, but there is no restriction on access.

Management of the Website

Significant changes and updates to the content of the site can be made on ‘Management’ pages. Our website package includes a well designed system of templates that lets designated users (those the College has authorized to have access to specific management pages) enter information directly onto the site. The College will thereby have the technical ability to keep the site current itself without having to engage outside consultants or go through a complex or lengthy publishing process. For example, the College intends to update Member information monthly, as opposed to the annual updates of the printed ACREL Handbook and Directory.

The Future

At this time, all materials and information will be posted by the ACREL office or by the Practice Technology Chairs, even on the Committee level. In the near future, it is anticipated that, at the very least, the Chairs of Committees will also be able to post information with respect to their respective Committees. Through the Forums, all Members may post information to the College. However, no postings of information in the Public Home Page areas will be made without the authorization of the Board of Governors.
The Practice Technology Committee welcomes comments and suggestions from all Members as to what they like and do not like about the Website, including any suggested changes, additions or the like that the Members may have. For example, the College may want to add live “chat room” capability to the Website, which would allow Members to communicate with each other on-line. In addition, the College may consider adding e-mail list capabilities to allow an e-mail message to go out to an entire Committee with one click.

We have high hopes for the Website, and believe it will make us a closer and better organization.