PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

It was a privilege and a pleasure to serve as your President in 2017-2018. It has been an incredibly rewarding year for me and I welcome this opportunity to reflect on the year behind us.

I am immensely proud of our association and its unwavering commitment to excellence, inclusivity and collegiality in the practice of law. At a time when many legal associations are struggling to maintain membership numbers, the CCLA continues to grow in all membership categories. Today, we are 2019 members strong and our association continues to expand in its size, strength, knowledge and diversity as we welcome new judges, lawyers, legal educators, paralegals, articling students and law students to our region each year.

Our Membership Committee (now chaired by your new President Karen Reid) and our Diversity Committee are working hard to develop strategies and programming intended to promote, celebrate and further increase the diversity within our legal community. We owe thanks to the members of both of these committees and the CCLA’s Membership Services Assistant, Sonia Morin, who have all contributed to the tremendous growth of our membership over the last decade. (Remarkably, our association has grown by more than 600 members since I was first elected to the Board of Trustees in 2009!)

Governance Update

Early on in my term, the CCLA’s Governance Committee developed a series of new governance documents including a Committee Governance and Communication Policy, a Sponsorship Policy, a Committee Members’ Code of Conduct together with Terms of Reference for fourteen (14) of the CCLA’s standing committees. This was a significant project that was undertaken, in part, to clarify the objectives and mandates of all CCLA committees and to create a fair and transparent process for filling committee vacancies.

The new governance documents are posted on the CCLA’s website, along with the names and contact information for the more than one hundred (100!!!) CCLA members who graciously volunteer their time to serve on one or more CCLA committees. (I owe a giant thank you to the CCLA’s Reference Librarian, Brenda Lauritzen, for the outstanding work she did updating the CCLA’s website with these new governance documents.)

Advocacy

In terms of advocacy, the voice of the CCLA remains among the strongest among the forty-six law associations in this province. The CCLA appreciates being invited to collaborate and provide input on matters of concern to our profession and over the course of the last year there have been many such invitations. During my Presidency, the CCLA offered thoughtful feedback to the Law Society on many critical issues facing the profession including proposed reforms in the areas of i) contingency fee arrangements; ii) the delivery of legal services to family law litigants; and, ii) the LSO’s licensing process.

I was very pleased to represent the CCLA at the spring and fall Plenary meetings of the Federation of Ontario Law Associations (FOLA) – an organization that plays a key role at a provincial level in representing and advocating on behalf of all Ontario law associations and the practising bar. I am especially grateful to Jaye Hooper, FOLA’s current chair and former CCLA President, for generously offering me an opportunity to deliver a presentation at FOLA’s November Plenary regarding the CCLA’s proposed solution to the ongoing articling crisis in Ontario. The presentation generated a lively and productive, province-wide
dialogue and I am happy to report that the CCLA’s proposed solution to the articling crisis attracted considerable interest and support. This is a subject about which I am especially passionate.

Education & Events

In 2017, the CCLA organized and hosted a total of forty (yes, FORTY!) Continuing Legal Education (CLE) and networking events. It would not have been possible to host this record number of events without the outstanding support of the CCLA’s unflappable and always accommodating Education and Events team, Jennifer Thompson and Kate Bell.

In addition to our four premiere cornerstone conferences, we offered our members an additional twenty (20) CLE events on a variety of subjects of interest to our members. The CCLA’s hardworking CPD Accreditation Committee approved 52.5 Substantive CPD hours and an additional 26.75 Professionalism CPD hours for CCLA CLE events. I wonder how many of our members fulfilled all their required CPD hours by attending CLE events hosted by the CCLA? I know I did!

On the events side, we offered our members an opportunity to participate in a broad range of social and networking events including our annual Golf Tournament and our annual Spring and Holiday Socials. Thanks to our energetic Diversity Committee, chaired by Asfrah Syed-Emond, we also introduced some new events in 2017 including a Diversity Social and a Black History Month event. Additionally, the CCLA hosted numerous receptions in the court house atrium including the reception that was held following the Opening of the Courts last fall and the many swearing-in ceremonies we celebrated in 2017.

In addition to the events we host for the benefit of our members, the CCLA also regularly participates in events organized to raise funds for local charities. Last year, the CCLA helped raise funds for several deserving charities through our participation in the annual Courthouse Food Bank Drive, the Lawyer Play and Law Day. We also sponsored the “Legal Services Cup Challenge” at the Dragon Boat Festival and provided support for the Beastly Ball II: Creepin’ it Real – an event organized by Barristers for a Better Bytown to help those in need in our community.

Some Notable Achievements & Celebrations

As I sit down to write this last section of my report, I am reminded how fortunate I was to serve as President during a year filled with some amazing achievements and celebrations.

Among the highlights of my year as President was representing the CCLA at the swearing-in ceremonies of five new judges to the Ontario Court of Justice and six new judges to the Ontario Superior Court of Justice here in Ottawa. (I also had the pleasure of attending the swearing-in ceremonies of two of our members to the Ontario Superior Court of Justice in Cornwall and in Toronto.) It is difficult to adequately capture in words the celebratory mood that was in the air on these special occasions and the sense of pride our membership feels about this tremendous tide of so richly deserved appointments to our already excellent bench. (Although our 2017 reception budget did not quite account for these appointments and the degree of celebration they attracted, our association nevertheless had a financially healthy year again thanks to the always excellent work of the CCLA’s diligent Financial Administrator, Wanda Walters, who continues to maintain a flawless accounting system.)

As you may know, in 2016, the CCLA’s library staff won FOLA’s Practice Resource Centre Innovation Award for its proposal to create “Will Check” – a wills registry for the East Region into which lawyers can deposit the location information about wills they create for their clients. With FOLA’s grant money, our Head Librarian (Jennifer Walker) and our Reference Librarian and in-house technical guru (Brenda Lauritzen)
transformed their idea into reality. I was especially proud to be in attendance when “Will Check” was officially launched at the 2017 East Region Solicitors Conference. I am thrilled to report that, in less than one year, the location information for more than 600 wills has been deposited into Will Check which is gaining province-wide recognition and praise. This significant achievement serves as a reminder of the depth of energy, talent and creativity resting within the CCLA’s staff members who add tremendous value to our association in so many ways.

Last, but not least, the CCLA’s plan to transform the CCLA Library and Barrister Lounge into a state-of-the-art learning centre is becoming a reality! Construction is now underway and, by this time next year, I expect we will have celebrated the grand opening of our new space. An extraordinary amount of time and effort has been dedicated to this important project since 2009 when the idea for this project was hatched at a strategic planning meeting organized by Rick Haga in his second year as the CCLA’s Executive Director. It seems somehow fitting that the completion of our renovation project will coincide very closely with Rick’s 10th anniversary as our Executive Director!

It would be impossible to mention and thank the many people who contributed in significant ways to the CCLA’s renovation project. I must however acknowledge and express gratitude to Abe Feinstein and Mary Jane Binks for the exceptional Phase I fundraising campaign they led during which, thanks to the very generous contributions from our membership, $800,000 was raised long before our designs were even finalized. A special thank you is also owed to Jennifer Walker and Rick Haga who offered valuable input at literally hundreds of meetings that have been organized with our designers, architects, project managers and MAG representatives over the years. (Jennifer Walker, along with library staff Brenda Lauritzen and Amanda Elliot, also recently undertook the mammoth task of culling our library collection for off-site storage in preparation for the commencement of construction.) Finally, each one of our Past Presidents since 2009 (Ian Stauffer, Clive Savage, Mary Jane Binks, Jaye Hooper, Ian McBride, Jennifer Birrell, Steven Gaon and Lynne Watt) deserves credit for the role they played in moving this project forward toward to the finish line. We did it!

Thank you

I am very much looking forward to stepping into the shoes of Past President. Before transitioning into my new role, I want to acknowledge and thank the many people who supported me during my term as President and who contributed to the successful year the CCLA has enjoyed.

I want to extend my gratitude to the members of the Executive Committee and Board of Trustees for the excellent work they carried out this year on behalf of the CCLA. I also need to thank the more than one hundred CCLA members who volunteered their time to serve on one or more of our CCLA Committees. In addition, I want to thank the many CCLA members who delivered presentations at our CLE events, organized town halls, served on a working group or took the time to bring ideas or issues of interest to my attention.

I also want to thank the CCLA staff (Sonia Morin, Wanda Walters, Jennifer Walker, Brenda Lauritzen, Amanda Elliot, Jennifer Thompson and Kate Bell) for the always excellent service they provide to our membership and for the tremendous support they have provided in connection with our renovation project. I very much look forward to seeing each of you settled in to your newly renovated workspaces before next year’s AGM.
Finally, I owe a heartfelt thank you to our Executive Director, Rick Haga, for his wise guidance, practical advice and outstanding leadership. Rick has a deep understanding and appreciation of the pride and passion that exists within our association and he shares that with us. Rick is truly a gem who, since 2008, has been an integral part of every single success that our association has celebrated. We are so very lucky to have him!