

Presidents Report for 2019

Eight years is a long time, and yet can go in a flash. It has been eight years since I first joined the Board, a time which culminated in my assuming the Presidency last March. I consider my time leading up to the Presidency as being a giant learning curve: the CCLA is multi-faceted, with fingers in many pies – continuing legal education, advocacy, supporting collegiality amongst its members, and providing support and coordination throughout the legal community, in Ottawa and beyond. It takes a long time to both understand fully what the CCLA is and does, and how one can fit into the machinations of the organization and, hopefully, make a difference.

When I joined the CCLA Board, the renovation project remained a pipe dream that was doggedly supported and championed by successive Presidents. At various times, all seemed lost, between design discussions, budget concerns, fundraising challenges, and the politics associated with getting support for, and subsequently getting work done, in the Courthouse. I was lucky enough to assume the Presidency when all that work had resulted in an approved design, an approved and manageable budget, a fundraising plan which worked, and finally signed contracts, construction, and ultimately completion of the project. As I have throughout the year, I want to thank the past presidents, and past boards, as well as those that supported us in fundraising, for ultimately bringing a dream to reality. More importantly, I want, on behalf of the CCLA, to thank all those who donated to the project – I hope you will agree with me when I say that your money has been well-spent! I was very proud to be able to host the official opening of the courthouse last fall, and see and hear the pride and praise that all who were there had for the completed CCLA space, and the efforts of all who contributed to its completion, not least of whom was our unflappable Executive Director, Rick Haga – thank you Rick!!

One of the CCLA's most important functions has been carrying out advocacy on behalf of our bar. While advocacy has long been a key mission of the CCLA, this year saw a number of occasions where advocacy became extremely important. There have been significant challenges which the profession has had to face this year, not the least of which were the legal aid cutbacks imposed by the provincial Conservative government in its budget last spring. I am proud of the fact that the CCLA was front and center in the response of the profession to the cutbacks. Within 48 hours of the announcement, the CCLA prepared and released an open letter decrying the cuts and demanding that the government reverse its decision. Since that time, we have continued to monitor and press the issue, supporting the Federation of Ontario Law Associations in its efforts as part of the Alliance for Sustainable Legal Aid. I have recently had the opportunity, as CCLA President and part of the lobbying efforts of FOLA, to lobby the provincial government directly on the subject of legal aid, and the damage that the cuts are doing to the judicial process, and, ultimately, to the public's access to justice. I can confirm that legal aid cuts remain of great concern to the CCLA, and we will continue to fight for a reversal of the cuts imposed by the provincial government.

More recently, the current provincial government announced a desire to change the method of appointment of provincial judges in the province. Again, the CCLA was quick to release a public letter defending the current system and suggesting that changes would damage what is clearly the gold standard for judicial appointments. Since then, the CCLA has been engaged in a consultative process with the government, and has been actively lobbying to preserve as much of the existing checks and balances as possible. While it is too early to determine the final results of our efforts, we know that our concerns have been listened to by the province and some changes already made. It is exciting to see that the CCLA is recognized as a key player at the provincial level, such that we have been directly addressed and consulted in this very political process.

Last spring saw an upheaval at the Law Society of Ontario, with the election of a slate of Benchers that stood on a single platform of “STOP SOP”, a reference to the Statement of Principles which the LSO required all members of the profession to make in their annual reports. As we all know, the slate was successful in reversing the LSO’s initiative, and the slate continues to make waves at the LSO, with a desire for change in many of the ways in which the LSO carries out its mandate. The CCLA is staying on top of activities of the Benchers at the LSO through its communication with the elected Benchers for our Region. Through that communication, we continue to have the opportunity to voice our concerns, and know that those concerns are being heard and taken to Toronto for consideration. I wish to thank the efforts of our regional Benchers, Cheryl Lean, Jean-Jacques Desgranges, and Cecil Lyon in particular, for making an effort to attend our meetings, keep us informed, and listen to our concerns and issues. Again, we understand that our concerns are important for the Benchers, and that we are certainly ‘punching above our weight’ in regard to our influence and importance on the provincial legal scene.

As I did at the opening of our new space, I want to reiterate that, for us at the CCLA, equity, diversity and inclusion have been and continue to be focal points for our activities. I wish to thank that Diversity Committee for its continued excellent work in supporting us in working towards improving EDI within our legal community. This will remain a top priority for the CCLA in years to come.

The CCLA’s educational events remain a fundamental underpinning of the CCLA’s activities, and the excellence of our events is known throughout the province. This is only possible through the commitment of the staff, and our members, who work hard together to organize and host these events. As a regular attendee at the Solicitors’ Conference, I remain glued to my seat throughout the conference and learn so much for use in my practice. I know it is the same for our other cornerstone conferences, and I extend thanks to those committees for their dedication to making each conference a thorough canvassing of all that’s new, while being a great opportunity to socialize and have fun. Our first priority amongst many is to ensure that our educational events remain of the highest quality and continue to provide a great opportunity to encourage collegiality amongst our members.

I am also proud of the Strategic Planning Retreat that we held in the fall. Many thanks to the invited participants, who helped us to frame our strategic direction over the next five years. As a result of the retreat, we have added an External Relations Committee, to help coordinate and increase our interactions with other legal stakeholders, and the public. This is particularly important in view of our increased profile in the provincial legal community. We have also determined some important governance issues which go to the heart of who we are and how we serve our members – you will be hearing more about this in the coming months – get ready for a survey or two! We also made some changes to our by-laws, to clarify some issues, and simplify procedures for various activities of the Association. Hopefully, by the time you read this, those changes will have been passed at our AGM.

This is also a time of thanks. I’d like to thank my Executive – Karen Reid, Craig O’Brien, Rosalind Conway, and Sean May, who have kept focused and stayed involved throughout the year on all issues which have come before us for action – I could not have done this without you. I also thank the balance of the Board – Andrew Ferguson, Robin Brown, Katie Black, Mark Habib, Antonio Giamberardino, Jennifer Jolly, Christine Powell, and Sean Bawden, all of whom have contributed actively to the Association’s success this year. As you know, we also have an amazing staff at the CCLA, who have made the operations of the CCLA smooth and seamless throughout the year. They have also supported me whenever I have needed help through the year – thank you to Amanda Elliott, Brenda Lauritzen, Jennifer Walker, Wanda

Walters, Sonia Morin, Jennifer Thompson, Kate Bell, Nicole Khalil and Taylor Pyefinch! Finally, a chance to thank Rick Haga one more time. We are blessed to have Rick as the backbone of this organization – quiet, calm, unflinching, patient, hardworking, loyal, and committed to the CCLA. Whenever I have a problem or an issue, I can ask Rick and know that he will be there to help, with sage advice and support. Thank you Rick!

Thanks to you, our members, for giving me the honour of being your President in this last year. Although a lot of work, I have enjoyed it immensely, particularly as I have had the opportunity to interact with so many of you, our faithful members, and I leave this position being prouder than ever of the CCLA and our bar.

- Ted Mann