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Omaha Bar's New President 08/03/12

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**Jennifer R. Petersen is settling in to lots of new responsibilities both at her new job at Werner Enterprises and as president of the Omaha Bar.**

## Omaha Bar's New President Planning Changes

**By Lorraine Boyd  
The Daily Record**

She's the youngest member of the Omaha Bar to become its president. At least, she's pretty sure she is. Certainly one of the youngest, having not yet reached her 40<sup>th</sup> birthday.

She's Jennifer R. Petersen and she took office on July 1, succeeding Craig Martin.

Jennifer is an employment law attorney at Werner Enterprises. She joined Werner in February after more than ten years at the law firms of Koley Jessen, Parsonage Vandenack Williams, and Gross & Welch.

Moving from Gross & Welch was difficult, she said, because of the wonderful friendships she made there, but her new job was one she couldn't pass up.

"I loved my firm, but this was a really neat in-house opportunity where I get to work in all areas of employment law. There are interesting and unique challenges, and great opportunities here," she said.

The Harlan, Iowa, native earned her law degree from the University of Iowa College of Law, *with distinction*, in 1998 and her bachelor's degree from Iowa State University.

After a start in Sioux City, she moved to Omaha where she began practicing employment law, first at Berens and Tate.

She has a long involvement with the Omaha Bar Association, serving on the executive council from 2002 to 2008, serving four terms as secretary. She rejoined the council and was elected president-elect last year.

### Year of Change

At the annual President's Reception in June, Petersen told members that the coming year would be one of change for the OBA.

That change starts at the top. Dave Sommers, who has been serving as interim executive director for the past couple of months, has been tapped as the organization's new full-time executive director. It marks the first time a lawyer has been chosen for the job. A formal announcement was made this week.

"He has done a great job," she said. "We're really excited to have him." Sommers (who was profiled in *The Daily Record* on June 16) is a solo practitioner attorney.

Other changes include embracing social media as a means to better meet the needs of OBA members, especially younger ones.

"There are several things we have been working on in the last year or so," Jennifer said.

"We are working on revamping our website. We are now on Facebook, and Twitter and we have a LinkedIn page.

"We're hoping to keep in touch with our members who use social media in that way. For those who don't, there would not be any change.

"For those who use social media, we are trying to use more of it to communicate with our members the way they want to be communicated with."

She said the OBA will be able to keep in touch with members through those social media sites.



“It’s all about better serving our members. We will continue to use the mail, because we want to serve our members with where they are and what their needs are.”

They are also evaluating the current newsletter.

“There probably have never been more options for members and more diverse needs for communication. Probably ever.”

She noted that age alone is not necessarily the determination as to whether people are in social media or not.

“What we want to do is serve our members the best way that we can. We may do more E-mail blasts, in part because it’s such a cost savings for our members. We want to be good stewards of our members’ money, so to the extent that we can use technology to save money and increase services, we want to do that.

“We’ll have to see how that goes. We don’t want anyone to feel left out. So we are evaluating all of our options.”

#### **OBA Events**

One special opportunity that she said is very exciting is the program this fall, on November 15, featuring Gen. William Suter (Ret.), the current clerk of the U.S. Supreme Court. He will give a presentation on the inner workings of the court at the Hruska Federal Courthouse.

Suter will also conduct a swearing-in ceremony for admission of interested attorneys to the Supreme Court Bar. OBA members are welcome to attend this free presentation and to apply for admission to the Supreme Court Bar.

CLE (Continuing Legal Education) credit is also being sought. Those who want to apply must submit their applications by August 24. Visit [www.supremecourt.gov/bar/baradmissions.aspx](http://www.supremecourt.gov/bar/baradmissions.aspx) for application information.

“We have been working since last fall with U.S. Corps of Engineers District Counsel Rick Totten, who first approached us about this, and Creighton University on the details of this visit, which presents a unique opportunity for OBA members.

“We even have someone whose child is an attorney who is flying in from another state and their spouse is also an attorney, so they are all going to get sworn in as a family. I think it’s really neat. We’re just thrilled to be involved.”

Petersen said current membership in OBA is around 1,200.

“One of the things Dave is going to be looking at is opportunities to increase membership. [To that end] we’re trying to emphasize CLEs.”

Examples of CLEs that have been offered free by OBA include the annual ethics seminar, Prof. Mike Fenner’s lunch presentation, and the medical malpractice dinner.

The Summer Family Event is another event being evaluated. For several years, the OBA visited the Henry Doorly Zoo. For the past three years, the Royals/Stormchasers baseball teams have been the attraction. There are lots of opportunities in Omaha, she said, and members’ ideas are welcome.

“We also have a young lawyers group that is organizing. The needs of newer lawyers are very different from those of veterans. They are often saddled with enormous student loan debt, with no guarantee of a job upon graduation.

We as a bar association have to look at ways that we can serve those folks.

“The Lawyer Referral program is a huge one for people who are hanging out their own shingle. It represents a potential source of clients and for advertising.”

She said the change in the Walk through the Courts last fall will be continued, with an afternoon session at the courthouses on October 3. And Nebraska Supreme Court Justice Mike Heavican will help the OBA welcome new lawyers at a dinner October 4.

“There has also been some emphasis on mentoring. Where that will go this year I don’t know. I think Dave [Sommers], as a young lawyer, can provide a unique insight.

“If I get all that done this year.... We’re going to be busy. So I’ve got to roll up my sleeves and get to work.

“This is going to be a year of change, there’s no doubt about it. What exactly that looks like, I don’t know. It’s a new chapter for OBA. We have a lot of opportunities for growth,” Jennifer said.

Jennifer’s husband is Kevin Jensen, an engineer for Conductix. They have two children, nine-year-old Michaela and five-year-old Grant.

“I do think I was the first to bring a new baby to my very first executive council meeting nine years ago.

“Thankfully, she was good and they didn’t seem to mind.”

