

A sidebar with ... Kaveh Kashef

By: Douglas Levy in News Stories February 27, 2017

When he's not involved in his commercial litigation practice, Kaveh Kashef focuses his attention on broadening legal endeavors of a different but just as important sort.

Since July 2016, Kashef has been president of the Oakland County Bar Foundation, which promotes and funds programs aimed at increasing access, affordability and understanding of the law and legal system. It's a partner to the Oakland County Bar Association.

"Being president has been fantastic," said Kashef, who is a member at Clark Hill PLC's Birmingham branch. "I've sat on the board of trustees for seven years now and have enjoyed my experiences with my fellow trustees and the executive board. Our executive director, Terri Ticknor Gilbert, and her team do a fantastic job.

"It's a seamless, well-run organization, and my job as the president, the steward, is to not screw it up, I suppose," he said with a laugh.



Kashef

The OCBF's biggest event is coming up soon, right?

Yes, we're running up toward our Signature Event, on April 28 this year at Oakland Hills Country Club in Bloomfield Hills. It's our premier fundraiser event and one of the most highly attended events in the Oakland County legal profession. We bring attorneys from the entire Metro Detroit area, as well as vendors who support our practices and clients.

As well-attended as the Signature Event is year after year, it would appear that that's the one time the OCBF gets a large share of the spotlight, so to speak. How does the OCBF make itself better known throughout the rest of the year?

That's a great question. It touches upon something that's been the focus of my presidency, and that's to expand our perspective beyond the two or three months that lead up to the Signature Event. It's to remember the foundation that fundraises 12 months out of the year. Over the course of 15 years, from approximately 2000, the foundation has had a lot of growth in its fundraising. And as a result, it's been able to fund various grant requests. However, the massive engine that pays for those grant requests is the Signature Event.

This year, my theme and message at every board meeting, and every publication I write for the Oakland County Bar Association LACHES articles or in interviews I have, is to spread the message that we need to become a 12-month-a-year fundraising organization. Normally we spend the first part of every year evaluating grant requests for the year using the funds from the net income of the prior year, and then that takes us to about January. Then from January to April we reach out to the various sponsors and individuals who buy tickets for the Signature Event, and that becomes our fundraising arm.

My goal is to change that model. It's to grant requests and fundraise all year long. In order to do that, what we're trying to do is participate in more community-based fundraising initiatives, such as the Give Detroit Challenge program that took place earlier this year, so we can harvest what I like to call people who donate just to donate. Not because they're expecting a ticket to an event, or marketing opportunities because they're a sponsor, but because they believe in what we do. They believe there's an under-service to the community in the area of law and legal education.

What are some of the challenges in getting that done?

There are institutional policies and perspectives that you always have to overcome. The foundation has implemented a model that focuses on the Signature Event and has been successful in its own right. So sometimes it becomes difficult to try to adjust people's perspectives and open up new ideas and implement them.

The foundation has really come into its own over the past 15 years, but it has sacrificed a little bit in terms of its own identity. It's closely perceived of with the Oakland County Bar Association, which is a relationship that we truly appreciate, respect and have a great deal of benefit from. But the foundation in and of itself has not done a very good job of crafting its own identity, marketing and branding, so it can make itself attractive for all community stakeholders, not just attorneys and law firms.

The various organizations and causes we support are not necessarily law firm driven. We are supporting over 20 organizations such as [the domestic violence shelter] HAVEN, Warriors Trust Fund, JARC and the Salvation Army's legal aid clinics, which permeate the entire region. Because we believe the mission we serve is not just lawyer- and law firm-centric — it's for the entire Southeastern Michigan community.

For more information on the Signature event, visit www.ocba.org/signature-event.



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