

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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This year the Annual Meeting of the Georgia Defense Lawyers Association was held in one of our favorite spots, Ponte Vedra, Florida, from July 18th – 21st. We celebrated our 35th Anniversary, and the Saturday night banquet was highlighted by a ten piece band and a tribute to all of our Past Presidents. This past year was an exciting time in the life of our Association, and it has been a privilege to serve as its President.

The GDLA could not be as successful as it is without the hard work and dedication of many of its members, and particularly the members of the Board of Directors. At this year's Annual Meeting, the Board held "open meetings" for those who expressed an interest in serving on the Board. In the event you were not able to attend the Annual Meeting and have interest in serving on the Board of Directors in the future, I would ask that you let Salty Forbes know of that interest.

As is the custom, I want to take this opportunity to highlight the year's activities and to specifically thank certain members for their extraordinary work and dedication to the Association. The Association returns to Ponte Vedra, Florida every third year, and has done so for many years. This is indeed a five star location, and is one of the best venues we attend. This year's Annual Meeting was exceptional, thanks to the efforts of our meeting chairman, Steve Kyle. For those of us who always thought that Steve was very "straight laced", it was a revelation to see him on stage with the band Saturday night. I hope that Johnny Foster got some good pictures of Steve for the newsletter.

Our newly elected President, Jerry Buchanan, put together an excellent program to highlight our Annual Meeting. Dr. Bill McCallister and Michael Boutot, presented the Association with many valuable ideas to make our law practices more efficient and profitable. Of all the speakers that we have ever had, these two were certainly the most energetic, and Jerry is to be commended for an excellent program.

Warner Fox, as Editor of the Law Journal, has put together yet another in a long line of excellent Journals, consisting of scholarly and timely legal articles, with emphasis on issues helpful to the defense practice.

Following last year's Annual Meeting at Destin, the officers held a retreat where we established as one of our primary goals, the solicitation of new members. While my original goal of new members was not met, I am pleased to announce that we did obtain over 50 new members during the last year. I am confident that this number will grow quickly as a result of the solicitation campaign that moved into high gear during the last few months, and under Jerry Buchanan's leadership. I urge each of you to be on the lookout for perspective new members, and to encourage them to join our organization.

As you know, the GDLA has established the Willis J. "Dick" Richardson, Jr. Scholarship Fund at the University of Georgia. This Fund will provide an annual award and scholarship for excellence in Georgia Practice and Procedure to the outstanding student in the Georgia Practice and Procedure course. This is indeed a fitting memorial to our "President in Perpetuity" and good friend, Dick Richardson, who passed away in 1999.

My good friend and Past President, Salty Forbes, continues to serve as unofficial "parliamentarian" at the Board meetings, and makes it a point to attend each and every meeting to make sure that nothing gets passed which is in conflict with the By-Laws. I appreciate Salty keeping me straight during the last year. In addition, Salty continues to serve on the DRI Board of Directors, and has been instrumental in keeping the GDLA apprised of matters of importance to the defense bar on a National level. David Whitworth, another one of our Past Presidents, served as the DRI State Representative, where he acted as the liaison between the DRI and the GDLA.

Jimmy Singer was actively involved this year as Chairman of the Amicus Committee. The Georgia Defense Lawyers Association submitted Amicus Briefs in at least two cases of common interest to the Defense Bar.

Johnny Foster did an excellent job in publishing several informative Newsletters throughout the year. In addition, he took charge of coordinating our sponsorship program and disseminating information to the Association's sponsors, who have grown considerably under his leadership. Our sponsors are an important source of supplemental income to the Association, and they deserve our thanks and patronage.

In November, 2001, the Association sponsored a combination social hour and professionalism seminar, which was organized by Jo Jagor and Karen Raby, with help from George Duncan. This was the first time the Association had held such an event, and it was a smashing success, filling Manuel's Tavern with attendees.

From November 29th to December 1st, 2001, the Association conducted its Annual Trial Academy at Calloway Gardens, under the leadership of Rusty Gunn, and a "cast of thousands." This undoubtedly is one of the highlights of the services that the Association provides, and is an excellent opportunity for firms to send their younger lawyers to an intense training session. The Trial Academy was well attended, and a special thanks to Rusty and the faculty who made the Academy a success.

On February 15, 2002, the mid-year seminar was put on in Atlanta by Staten Bitting and Luanne Clarke. This year's seminar deviated from the usual format, in that it contained a joint session with a breakout session concentrating either on trial tactics or workers' compensation issues. The seminar was very well received, with over 85 attendees, and many thanks to Staten and Luanne for all of the time and effort they put into making this one of the best seminars we have sponsored.

On May 29, 2002, the GDLA sponsored another social get together in Atlanta. This was spearheaded again by Jo Jagor and George Duncan, and concentrated primarily on welcoming new members to our Association, and encouraging perspective members to join our ranks. We hope to expand these gatherings throughout the State.

As you can see, this was a busy and productive year for the Georgia Defense Lawyers Association. I, like all those before me, want to express my special appreciation to our Executive Secretary, Al Shurley, for all that she does for the Association. Al truly works "behind the scenes" and is directly responsible for keeping us moving in the right direction.

In closing, let me say that it has been an honor to be your President this year, and I wish the current officers, Jerry Buchanan, Rick Rominger and Grant Smith, continued success. We elected several new and energetic members to the Board of Directors at the Annual Meeting, and I know that this will be another productive year. I intend to stay active in the affairs of the Association, and look forward to helping the GDLA continue to grow and to enhance and improve the services which it provides to its membership.

Walter B. McClelland
President