

# BUILDING ALL RELATIONSHIPS

By Stephen D. Williams

**H**ello to my fellow members of the Solo, Small Firm and General Practice Division. My name is Stephen D. Williams, and it is my honor to be your Chair-Elect this year and the incoming Chair for the Bar Year that will begin at the ABA Annual Meeting in New York this August.

By way of introduction, let me take this opportunity to provide you with my background. First and foremost, my firm is me. I'm a solo practitioner, like many of you, and I have practiced for the past 11-plus years in the Borough of Flemington, New Jersey. Never heard of Flemington? It is a small community in the western part of central New Jersey, located approximately 63 miles from Times Square in New York City and 50 miles from Independence Hall in Philadelphia. It was also the site, in 1935, of what was called the "Trial of the Century" (prior to the O.J. Simpson trial): Flemington, the county seat of Hunterdon County, was where the State of New Jersey tried Richard Hauptmann for the kidnapping of Charles Augustus Lindbergh Jr. three years earlier. This case garnered international news coverage that the locals say rivaled that of the O.J. case 60 years later. It was my honor to serve as counsel during the penultimate jury trial in the Lindbergh courtroom.

As with many of you, the struggles of running my own practice have been challenging and yet rewarding. Prior to becoming a solo practitioner, my past practices have been with firms that had as few attorneys as three or as many as 40 in an insurance-based defense practice.

Although I currently practice in New

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Stephen D. Williams (steve@sdwilliamslaw.com), the guest contributor of this issue's column, is Chair-Elect of the GPSolo Division. He is a solo practitioner in Flemington, New Jersey, focusing on family and criminal law



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Jersey, where I was born and raised, my legal career includes a stretch in Louisiana. I attended law school at Louisiana State University and passed the state's bar exam. Working for three different trial court judges in the 15th Judicial District Court (made up of Acadia, Lafayette, and Vermilion Parishes in southwest Louisiana), my passion for the profession grew.

In addition to involvement in the ABA's GPSolo Division, my commitment to the New Jersey State Bar Association has allowed me to serve as chair of its Municipal Court Practice Section, and I currently serve on its Membership and Unauthorized Practice of Law and Ethics Committees.

Before addressing what we will be doing in the GPSolo Division next year, I would be remiss not to mention what is still to come this year thanks to Chair David Lefton's leadership and planning. Our Spring Meeting in Scottsdale, Arizona, May 17 to 20, will be another joint gathering with our friends from the Group Legal Services Association (GLSA). This meeting will feature many thought-provoking and engaging

programs—everyone attending will gain valuable information for their individual practice. I encourage each of you to join our Division at the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess for what will surely be a memorable event.

## THE BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP

What is coming in 2017–2018? First, know we will continue bringing you the unique member benefits you already enjoy to help you in your daily practice:

- ABA Solo and Small Firm Resource Center ([ambar.org/soloandsmallfirms](http://ambar.org/soloandsmallfirms)), providing marketing, technology, practice management, CLE, and substantive law resources for solo and small firm lawyers.
- GPSolo LinkedIn social media group ([tinyurl.com/n24dlqt](http://tinyurl.com/n24dlqt)), where members can connect, make referrals, and read publications written or shared by other members.
- SoloSez ([solosez.org](http://solosez.org)), the "virtual water cooler" where solo practitioners can pose questions, offer advice, and share information.
- Our award-winning books and publications, including the *GPSolo eReport* and *GPSolo* magazine, keeping you up-to-date on the latest legal topics and practice methods.
- Our virtual Brown Bag luncheons, an ongoing series of lunchtime seminars, free to you, our members, examining a wide variety of topics ranging from cutting-edge practice developments to substantive law and practice management advice.
- Our ongoing relationships with other Sections, Divisions, and Forums within the ABA.

In designing these benefits, we never forget that GPSolo is the home of the nation's solo, small firm, and general practice attorneys, as well as the home of its

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military attorneys; as such, our programming will always focus on serving these members.

### **BUILDING ALL RELATIONSHIPS**

Our theme for 2017–2018 is captured in the abbreviation BAR, which stands for Building All Relationships. As anyone who practices law knows, this business is all about relationships, and these relationships cover every aspect of our lives. First and foremost is the relationships we have with our families, which bear the brunt of our profession on a daily basis. In our practices, obviously, our most important relationship is with our clients because without them, well, we wouldn't have a practice. Then there are the relationships we have with our fellow lawyers, either within our office or our adversaries, co-counsel, and associates. If you litigate, there are your all-important relationships with the court personnel and the judiciary. Finally, there are the relationships we have within the community, which could help develop businesses. All relationships are important to all of us, and we must focus on these to improve the practice of law and the interaction with our family, friends, and communities.

### **DIVISION MEETINGS IN 2017–2018**

Our Fall Meeting will take place October 19 to 21, 2017, in St. Paul, Minnesota, near the northern source of the Mississippi River. The conference will be held at the historic St. Paul Hotel in the heart of downtown. Known for its old-world charm and sophistication, the hotel is a mere block away from the Xcel Energy Center, home of the Minnesota Wild, and across the street from the old courthouse that was used to try many of the 1920s prohibition criminal trials. And St. Paul is only a \$1.75 light-rail ride away from downtown Minneapolis (its sister city).

The St. Paul meeting will continue the

legacy of our past two Solo & Small Firm Summits as we turn our attention once again on how to build a better, more successful practice through tips and ideas to help you better market your firm, develop a larger client base, and quite frankly make more money. We will offer plenary sessions with high-profile national speakers and continue our tradition of great social events.

As some of you may know, the Division's top corporate sponsor for many years has been Thomson Reuters. This meeting will be unique because we will start on Thursday afternoon on the campus of Thomson Reuters for a welcome CLE session, followed by our opening Welcome Session and Reception thrown by Thomson Reuters for all attendees.

Following the success of last fall's Diversity Reception, we will hold a Diversity Roundtable followed by the Second Diversity Reception. Diversity is a key component driving the BAR message by bridging the gap between all people regardless of their gender, nationality, color, sexual identification, or political viewpoint.

The schedule for this meeting will allow you to explore the greater Minneapolis–St. Paul region, and if the professional sports schedule makers cooperate, there may be an opportunity to see the Minnesota Vikings, Wild, or Timberwolves while we are there.

From April 26 to 28, 2018, GPSolo will have our Spring Meeting in the City that Care Forgot, New Orleans. This meeting will once again be a joint meeting with our friends from GLSA. If you were at our meetings in Las Vegas or Key West, you know the tremendous programs that GLSA puts on, which more than make this meeting worth attending. In addition, we will host the networking opportunities that you have come to expect—and lots of fun in the Big Easy.

We will be staying at the Sheraton New Orleans Hotel just outside the French Quarter on Canal Street. Our meeting coincides with the first weekend of the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, held annually at the New Orleans Fair Grounds Race Course. This will allow our attendees the opportunity to see and enjoy a variety of musical artists of all types, including some of the top music acts in the world. The schedule will be announced in early 2018, and it will be my personal commitment to make sure that everyone has plenty of time to tailor their schedule and attend as many performances as they can. The intention with this meeting is to begin the day early so that everyone can enjoy Jazz Fest.

In addition to our Division meetings, our Division will once again be a presence at the ABA Midyear Meeting, February 1 to 4, 2018, in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, and the ABA Annual Meeting, August 2 to 5, 2018, in Chicago, Illinois; at the Annual Meeting we intend to bring back "Solo Day," where you can pick up CLE credits in a broad array of substantive legal fields.

### **JOIN US!**

The 2017–2018 GPSolo Division Bar Year will be an exciting one filled with something for every attorney across this great nation of ours. As such, I am humbled and yet excited by the prospect of becoming Chair in the upcoming year. There will be no BAR to how far we can go and no BAR on the commitment we all have to the Solo, Small Firm and General Practice Division, where our motto is "Your Success, Our Mission." ■