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CITY OF LAWYERLY LOVE

Philadelphia's New YLD Chairman Has Big Plans For Lawyers and City Youth

BY LAUREN RUSSELL

Scott Sigman has a history with Philadelphia. Raised in the northeast section of the city, Sigman remembers hearing stories of his great-great-grandfather checking telephone poles during storms while working at the Philadelphia Electric Company. His great-grandfather fought in World War I and played an active part in the helping the community stay safe during World War II.

And with what he has accomplished so far and plans to accomplish in the future, Sigman is right up there with the men in his family. As the new 2008 chairman of the Philadelphia Bar Association's Young Lawyers Division, Sigman has incorporated his love for Philadelphia and its people into his plans for bettering the community.

"Philadelphia is ... near and dear to my heart," said Sigman, a 33-year-old associate at Bochetto & Lentz. Now, as the YLD chairman, Sigman said he wants to help his beloved hometown "be recognized for the great city that it is."

Sigman, who said he is most excited about "having an impact on the children of Philadelphia" and helping his colleagues have a positive experience in the profession, has a plan for the people of Philadelphia — and it comes in a two-part vision for the Young Lawyers Division.

The first part of the vision is to better benefit young lawyers through education, politics and networking. "We need to do what helps us as young lawyers," said Sigman, listing off the many ways to accomplish this goal.

"We need to take issue with any big changes affecting young lawyers ... [and] do whatever we need to do to educate ourselves on [these] issues," said Sigman. He noted one current topic that will have an impact on young lawyers: the push to put a sales tax on legal services.

Sigman also mentioned Philadelphia 2020, a YLD program that works with a number of groups of young professionals to better the city and make it more inviting to young people in the various professions.



Photos by Nanette Kardaszski

The new chairman also said he plans to work with the new mayor of Philadelphia, Michael Nutter. According to Sigman, Nutter is willing to work with the YLD, and in reaching out to the new mayor, the YLD will have more open communication with the city.

Sigman's plans for the YLD extend beyond the mayor's office: He plans to get the Philadelphia YLD more involved in the American Bar Association.

With the ABA's 2008 annual meeting scheduled to be held in New York City, the YLD will be able to take a more active role in the association, according to Sigman. "This is the first time [the YLD] will have a large presence at the conference," he said. "We will get to hear about national issues and get to network with young lawyers from around the country."

With Sigman heading the Philadelphia YLD, young lawyers will have opportunities not only to branch out to political groups and bar associations, but to each other through networking and social events.

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“[Networking] is important to me because I was there not too long ago,” said Sigman, adding that as a young lawyer starting out, one doesn’t know many lawyers or how to meet them.

Social and networking events like the ABA conference and happy hours put on by the YLD are not exclusive to just young lawyers, according to Sigman. Young lawyers will be able to meet not only young lawyers, but other young professionals and also members of the senior bar. Networking like this will give young lawyers the ability to expand into other areas, jobs and positions, and reach out to people because of their experience with YLD, said Sigman. “This will help expand our practices and serves as lawyers.”

Besides his fellow young lawyers, another group Sigman plans to help is Philadelphia’s youth. Continuing the YLD’s closeness to Philadelphia’s young community and “doing good for it” is something he says is “a core mission of mine ... and something we will strive in.”

Sigman plans to do this through YLD activities such as the People’s Law School, which teaches law to the people of Philadelphia, the bar association’s Law Week and, most important to Sigman, the Lawyer for a Day and High School Mock Trial programs.

The Lawyer for a Day program allows high school students to participate as lawyers in Philadelphia courts for the day, and the year-long mock trial program allows students to play



Photos by Nanette Kardaszski

the roles of lawyers and witnesses in a simplified mock trial. Approximately 30 public and parochial high school teams compete each year.

“Some judges will see the kids perform in court and say that [the students] are better than some attorneys,” said Sigman, who has seen high school students who can’t even afford a suit win mock trial competitions in Philadelphia, go on to national competition and accomplish the biggest challenge of all, going to college.

To Sigman, whether they pursue law or not, “the fact that they go on to college is amazing.”

Though some students who go on to college may find a different career choice, for Sigman, a career in law was always his dream. Sigman’s great-grandfather — the World War I veteran — was involved in Philadelphia politics and was a large influence on Sigman.

“I wanted to be a prosecutor; to clean up crime and put the bad guys away,” said Sigman. When he got the opportunity, he did just that.

After earning his J.D. from Temple University’s Beasley School of Law in 2001, Sigman immediately started working at the Philadelphia District Attorney’s Office, where he had interned during his studies at Temple. He became an assistant DA and was assigned to the Special Narcotics Prosecution Unit. It was in this position that Sigman prosecuted the first weapons of mass destruction case in Pennsylvania.

He also worked with police to shut down drug and criminal enterprises in Philadelphia and served as prosecutor for the Weed & Seed Project — a federally supported program that, according to the U.S. Department of Justice Web site, “aims to prevent, control, and reduce violent crime, drug abuse, and gang activity in designated high-crime neighborhoods across the country.” Philadelphia currently has three Weed & Seed sites in North and West Philly.

When his specialized unit lost funding in 2005, Sigman made a career decision to try something new — to learn about civil practice and Philadelphia politics. It was a huge change to go from “expert in criminal law” to civil litigation, one that took one year of re-educating himself, said Sigman. He coolly added, “Like anything, if you put time into it, you can learn it.”

These days, Sigman works mainly on civil litigation on the plaintiffs side. He also works on the defense for some white collar crime cases — a side of the law he knows very well thanks to his position as assistant DA, which not only made him familiar with criminal law, but also made him a member of the YLD.

While working at the DA’s office, one of Sigman’s friends, Dennis Collin, suggested he get involved with the YLD. At the time, out of 330 attorneys at the office, only 11 were involved in the YLD, according to Sigman. The numbers did not scare him away.

Sigman took his friend’s advice and got involved. He took a seat on the board and ran for office. Sigman has now been on the YLD board for seven years, serving in such positions as financial secretary, vice-chairman, chairman-elect and now as the 2008 chairman.

“The [Philadelphia Bar Association] has over 1,200 attorneys. One third are under the age of 37. ... That’s a large number of people that I will be representing. It is a huge responsibility to lead young lawyers and help the community,” he said.

With a love for the city and the profession, a long list of accomplishments and big plans as the next chairman of the YLD, Scott Sigman has come a long way from the boy growing up near Byberry Road and Bustleton Ave. He has become a young lawyer guiding his peers and an active participant in bettering the community, marking his place in Philadelphia’s history. •



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