



PRESIDENT'S PAGE THOMAS H. BIENERT, JR.

OCBA Section Membership Can Enhance Your Practice

Our bar association is dedicated to serving its members. Nowhere is that goal more evident than in the work of the OCBA's Sections.

Sections are established by the OCBA Board of Directors for the presentation, discussion, and study of matters pertaining to the practice of law. They are a primary way to stay sharp in your area of practice. Section members learn new developments, share ideas, and explain practice tips in their given topic. We currently have 25 different Sections, covering practice areas as general as Business Litigation, Business & Corporate Law, and Torts & Trials, and as specific as Social Security, Workers' Compensation, and Trusts & Estates. One Section, the Solo Practitioner/Small Firm Section, isn't related to a particular practice area but addresses the important goal of successfully operating a law practice. For a full listing of our Sections, check out the OCBA website (ocbar.org), which provides a brief description of each one.

The roster of Sections isn't stagnant, but evolves to stay abreast of emerging trends in law. "As new practice areas develop, new Sections have been formed to address the needs of members," notes former OCBA President Lei Lei Wang Ekvall. "Kudos to Michael Baroni for starting one of our newest Sections—Entertainment, Sports, & Marketing Law. This Section is off to a great start and is another example of the OCBA staying relevant and providing value."

Most Sections meet monthly, typically during the lunch hour, with a pre-planned agenda or topic to be covered. Section chairs are always interested in topic ideas from members, so Section members have the ability to suggest and influence programming. The ideas need not be limited to discussions of substantive law. Mike Yoder, another former OCBA President, recalls that after watching a "Top Gun" program at an ABA Conference, he proposed that the OCBA Business Litigation Section hold such an event. "We started our 'Top Gun' event that year, and it was a tremendous success. We had four terrific trial attorneys—Wylie Aitken, Vern Hunt, Don Morrow, and Stuart Waldrip—present a mock trial to a jury we had brought in to hear the matter. The jury not only deliberated and reached verdicts on the merits, but also described what they liked about each attorney's presentation. We ended with a Q and A session between our members and the mock trial attorneys, where each talked to us about his strategy and arguments. The event was thoroughly informative and entertaining." So much so, that Mike's "Top Gun" suggestion became a popular event for several years thereafter.

Section events aren't limited to attorneys, but involve members of the judiciary as well. Dean Zipser, 2005 OCBA President, says, "I've thoroughly enjoyed my nearly thirty years in the Business Litigation Section. In addition to meeting terrific attorneys, I've gotten to learn the perspectives of many judges, who often appear at Section events as both attendees and panelists, and give the judicial perspective in particular practice areas."

The Sections are also the OCBA's "go-to" place for expertise. From time to time the Executive Committee and Board of Directors will need guidance on matters that require specialized knowledge. When this occurs, they look to the appropriate Section to act in an advisory capacity to the Committee or the Board.

Of course, Section meetings are also social events and networking opportunities. A typical meeting involves spending an hour or so with 30 to 100 of your peers. At a minimum, you'll share a laugh or two (great source for attorney jokes). But you'll also have the opportunity to get to know other attorneys you might otherwise not. "Helping put on my Section's 'Top Gun' event allowed me to get to know these terrific trial lawyers on a personal basis," says Mike Yoder, who recalls staying in touch with them for years thereafter. "I even became a regular at the Aitken firm's Christmas party and drank green beer at their St. Paddy's Day event," laughs Mike. On a more serious note, Mike points out that he and several of his colleagues have made lasting friends and business referrals through their OCBA Section involvement.

Each Section has its own leadership and procedures. Each elects its own chairperson and other officers as it may require from time to time, and establishes its own procedures for the conduct of its business, subject to policies and procedures established by the Board of Directors. Each Section provides a written yearly report to the OCBA Board of Directors, naming its officers and summarizing its procedures and activities. Not surprisingly, Section membership often leads to other prominent roles in the OCBA for those who are interested. Committee members, Committee chairs, Directors on the Board, and OCBA officers are usually chosen from the ranks of the Sections.

Joining a Section is easy. Simply contact the OCBA and let them know you'd like to join a Section. There's a quick form to fill out and a nominal fee of \$35.00. Of course, before joining, you are welcome to attend a Section meeting to confirm your interest. The OCBA calendar of events on the OCBA website lists the times and places of each Section's meetings.

As practicing attorneys, it's critical that we stay on top of our practice areas. OCBA Section membership is a meaningful, enjoyable way to do so, usually in a lunch setting that is not very time-consuming. And since most Section presentations are qualified for CLE credit, Section members can easily fulfill their State Bar CLE requirements. Give some thought to whether any of our Sections can assist you in your practice areas. It sure beats sitting at your desk eating ramen noodles for lunch.



Thomas H. Bienert, Jr. specializes in trial work, civil litigation, and white-collar criminal defense for Bienert, Miller & Katzman, PLC. He can be reached at tbienert@bmkattorneys.com.