Message from the Outgoing President at the AGM

Joseph Neuberger

As my term comes to an end, I am feeling both reflective about my time serving in this office and optimistic about what lies ahead for our organization.

One year ago, I spoke about community and how the TLA provides rich opportunities for our members to come together with colleagues, judges and experts to learn and exchange important ideas and experiences. The TLA nourishes both our needs to network and learn through our successful soirees and education sessions (Nutshells). These programs continue to play a vital role in meeting our membership’s continuing education needs as well as opportunities for our members to connect with each other.

In the last year the TLA has worked closely with many associations, including CDLPA (County & District Law Presidents Association), RODA (Round Table of Diversity Associations), Peel Region Lawyers Association, York Region Lawyers Association, Criminal Lawyers Association and of course the Law Society on a number of important issues facing our profession.

First and foremost have been the challenges facing our Court House and county law libraries across the province; funding issues will remain a prominent issue going forward. In cooperation with CDLPA and the Law Society, changes were implemented to the LibraryCo Board, staff and operations. The TLA has active representation on the LibraryCo Board in the role of Vice-Chair of this committee. We will continue to explore innovative ways for our Practice Resources Centres, not just in Toronto, but in all of our County Court Houses across the Province, to provide enhanced and relevant services to lawyers.

Our Advocacy efforts which have remained a significant part of the TLA’s core activities. Over the last year we have participated in consultations, including drafting and submitting reports or letters on the following processes/issues:

- Toronto Civil Bench and Bar Committee
- Consultation on Law of Negligence
- Access to Justice and Legal Aid
- Paralegal Regulation

You can read more about our efforts in each of these matters on the TLA website (www.tlaonline.ca). Our advocacy on important issues will serve to highlight the TLA as a leader among our fellow associations.
Over the last year we have also continued to maintain our strong relationship and open communication with the Law Society of Upper Canada, through the TLA President’s regular attendance at the Treasurer’s Liaison Group meeting, and our support and participation in the TAG Access to Justice Initiative.

The TLA continued with its diversity initiatives, including through its membership in “RODA”, a forum of equity seeking associations which has come together to foster dialogues and initiatives that relate to the advancement of diversity, equality and inclusion in the legal profession in Canada.

As a member of the Roundtable of Diversity Associations, the TLA was well informed regarding the issues relating to the LSUC’s consideration last spring of the proposed accreditation of a law school at Trinity Western University. The TLA was able to draft and submit a submission as part of the LSUC’s consultation process on that issue. Along with RODA, the TLA hosted the fourth, very successful, Diversity Soirée in November in our TLA Lounge. The new Chief Justice George Strathy provided well-received opening remarks highlighting the importance of our continued efforts to promote diversity in our profession.

This past year the TLA has also continued to pay attention to matters of relevance to the global legal community. We sent a representative to the World City Bar Leaders Conference which is an international conference bringing together leaders of metropolitan bar associations around the world.

While the TLA recognizes that looking outward and building bridges is good, it is also aware that developing our own strengths is important too. Early last year, a call for new TLA Trustees and Committee Members resulted in a large number of young lawyers stepping forward. As a result, the TLA decided to form a Young Lawyers Working Group, advisory in nature, which has provided valuable feedback and ideas for new initiatives to the TLA board and Executive Director.

As part of our focus inward, the TLA conducted a special board meeting dedicated to strategic thinking, mapping a course for our future. From this meeting the TLA was able to articulate the following Vision and Mission: We are Toronto lawyers. Our mission is to promote and provide knowledge, advocacy and community. Our vision is a highly engaged community that creates essential resources for Toronto lawyers.

As part of its emphasis on the importance of nurturing our entire community, the TLA has continued in a leadership role in the fundraising for and support of the Toronto Lawyers Feed the Hungry program. Two events raised over $30,000 for the cause: Billiards with the Bar, Chalk One up Against Hunger and the Fall Ball, Part 2. Finally, through the hard work of our Feed the Hungry committee a new fundraising initiative has come to fruition, a campaign to encourage Toronto lawyers to commit to a monthly donation of $5.00 per month on a credit card. We remain committed to helping ensure the financial health of this much-needed program that serves some of our city’s most vulnerable and disadvantaged. I hope you will join in the campaign.

At this time we say goodbye and thank you to some of our board members and in particular to our current Past President, Miriam Young. Miriam’s hard work and vision has been an
inspiration to us all. We also welcome new board trustees who hopefully come with enthusiasm and energy, for there will be many important issues for the TLA to tackle over the coming year and years. I welcome Chris Wayland, taking over as TLA president, and wish him well.

The TLA is a wonderful association, where I have had the pleasure over many years to make good friends and an opportunity to grow as a lawyer and as a person. I hope you all take the time to come out to our events, participate in our committees and help our voice be heard on behalf of our membership on important issues.