

Legal Leaders Gather in NYC To Celebrate A Bar Association and Attorney Volunteerism

By Susan Master, Esq.
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LOWER MANHATTAN — Judith S. Kaye, chief judge of the State of New York, joined with Robert Hirshon, president of the American Bar Association, Lorraine Power Sharp, president of the New York State Bar Association, and Michael Miller, president of the New York County Lawyers Association (NYCLA) to rededicate NYCLA's building.

NYCLA is located at 14 Vesey St., diagonally across Church Street from the World Trade Center site. The reception was both an evening of remembrance and celebration, a solemn memorial to the victims of September 11, and a tribute to the record number of attorneys who volunteered their time and expertise in the aftermath.

"This has been a skimming hour for the New York bar, the courts, lawyers, judges, and employees of the Unified Court System," said Chief Judge Kaye. "We are strong as Americans and are extending American justice to every member of the public."

Many references were made to the outpouring of attorneys who volunteered to assist with death certificates and other legal concerns, and to the legislators who help change the law to allow assis-

tance for the victims' families.

The theme of Chief Judge Kaye's remarks was "congratulations." She congratulated NYCLA on their "commitment to its 94-year history" and she congratulated its president and staff on reaching a "scope of needs of clients and victims," while they were inconvenienced because their "practices were destroyed and offices were displaced."

ABA President Hirshon, who is proud of his Brooklyn connection in that "all four of my grandparents came through Ellis Island," said, "I sense that this is a homecoming. There is an aspect of pride and a focus on continuing to be Americans as we look to the future and certainly remember the past."

Hirshon, who is from Maine, said about the 400,000 member ABA, "A lot of eyes were on this community, and your colleagues saw a community come together in a way that brought tears to our eyes."

"That spirit was an inspiration that brought strength to us," said Hirshon. "As a profession, we have never shined so brightly. NYCLA demonstrated to a skeptical public how lawyers help in a time of crisis. You brought honor to our profession and demonstrated the highest ideals of lawyers."

NYSBA President Sharp said, "The public should know what lawyers al-

ready know about themselves: Lawyers love to apply their training to help the public good." She said that once attorneys in Albany heard about the attack, "lawyers near the state's capital wanted to get in their cars, come to New York City, and dig." They continued, "It was truly a New York family in pain."

"Popular depictions of lawyers focus on combat, but they collaborate and work together with a sense of belonging to an organization. We are strengthened by association with each other and are all in this together."

More than 150 lawyers attended the function, some of whom crossed the river from Brooklyn. Steve Hoffman, Esq., a NYCLA past president who lived in Flatbush for most of his life, said, "It is really thrilling that the historic building was left unharmed. It is proclaimed the great democratic bar association because it was the first in the country to admit all lawyers."

Melvin C. Levine, Esq., chair of the civil court practice section, and whose "godfather was originally from Crown Heights" explained, "The rededication is a very momentous event because it is a recognition of the reason it was founded. It was meant to accept minorities and women when other bar associations did not."

There was a moment of silence in memory of the three court officers who joined in the rescue effort and did not make it out alive. The rest of the evening was a toast to the resilience of the magnificent 72-year-old edifice which escaped harm in the shadow of disaster and a recognition of the area attorneys who brought a glimmer of light to the city's darkest days.



Judge Judith Kaye, chief judge of the State of New York.



Michael Miller, president, New York County Lawyers Association.