



SD County Bar hopes to better integrate new lawyers

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The San Diego County Bar Association has revamped its approach to integrating newer lawyers into the fold in hopes of helping them better connect with the bar's wide range of programs and more experienced members.

One component of the restructuring is a name change for the county bar's group for new attorneys from the New Lawyer Division to the Forum for Emerging Lawyers.

The bar association has also, for the first time, created a board-level committee that will oversee all the services and programs for new lawyers.

Richard Huver, the president of the SDCBA, said he believes the forum and the increased oversight of the offerings for newer lawyers will prevent young attorneys from becoming "their own little island" within the bar.

"What we found is that although the New Lawyer Division was great at creating community for newer attorneys, it tended to limit their exposure to programs and activities available barwide," Huver said. "The whole goal of the restructuring is to help to integrate new lawyers into the wider bar association and legal community."

In addition to joining the forum, the SDCBA is also encouraging new attorneys to take part in groups based on practice area.

The bar association offers more than 20 sections covering a variety of practice areas -- such as construction law and family law -- and recently eliminated the dues to join them.

Huver said the sections not only help attorneys learn more about a field of practice that is of interest, but they also allow young lawyers to do the type of networking that could help them secure a job or find a mentor.

"When I look back on my career, I think about the people I met as a new lawyer that helped shape my career and path in the profession," said Huver, founder of **Huver Law Firm**.

The Forum for Emerging Lawyers will include networking events and the chance for attorneys to participate in an annual community service project. It will also include an e-community that includes a listserv and comprehensive file-sharing system.

While those opportunities are similar to the ones offered in the past, the criteria for participating have changed.

Attorneys in their first four years of practice will be able to take part in the forum instead of new attorneys being defined as those with fewer than seven years of experience.

Alanna Pearl, a recent past president of the New Lawyer Division, said she was a strong supporter of changing the criteria.

“Attorneys hitting their fifth year of practice have much different needs than attorneys with less experience,” said Pearl, the co-founder of **Inter Alia Lawyers**, who is entering her seventh year as an attorney.

Pearl also said she thinks the SDCBA retooling its approach for young attorneys is a step in the right direction because in the past, many attorneys in the New Lawyer Division “didn’t bridge the gap to get involved with larger organization and get involved with more seasoned attorneys.”

Nicole Heeder, the first chairwoman of the new forum, said she is looking forward to creating a strong sense of community among newer lawyers rising through the ranks together.

She sees the initiative as a great opportunity for young attorneys to connect with others who may not be in the same practice area, but are new to the legal field and facing similar experiences.

“I think it is really important to start building that community early on and the forum allows new attorneys to do that,” said Heeder, principal attorney at **Law and [M]Ocean**.

An estimated 7 to 10 percent of the bar's more than 10,000 members have up to five years experience.

Huver said he expects positive feedback to the bar’s updated efforts to help young attorneys, but the new board-level committee, called the Council on the Integration of Emerging Lawyers, also will make sure any concerns are addressed.

There will be close communication between the council, known as CIEL, and the forum, he said.

“The sole function for CIEL is to oversee the whole new lawyers section to make sure at the bar we are doing what they need and what they want,” Huver said.

The revised approach to integrating new lawyers comes at the same time the county bar association has amended its career development program, which used to be known as its mentoring program.

The committee overseeing the program has placed a renewed emphasis on supporting those professionals providing the mentoring, so they can best assist younger attorneys.

Lilys McCoy, a co-chairwoman of the career development committee, said mentors are being provided with a suggested curriculum and discussion topics.

She also has made herself available to provide any additional assistance requested by mentors, who, as part of the program, are assigned to meet with groups of young attorneys who share similar interests.

“Hopefully, this will result in a richer experience for younger professionals who are being mentored, and also dovetail nicely with the Forum for Emerging Lawyers,” said McCoy, who is also a county bar board member and director of the Center for Solo Practitioners at Thomas Jefferson School of Law.