President’s Message || By Laurel Bellows

Leading-Edge Legal Opportunities
ABA helps lawyers thrive by being at the forefront of new practice areas

Serving the growing number of elders who need legal help. Guiding companies through complicated efforts to combat cybercrime. Practicing law that focuses on collaboration. These are among expanding fields of law that offer opportunities to new law school graduates, those looking to return to law and seasoned practitioners in search of a fresh start.

The job crisis facing our legal community is very real and very serious. The ABA is focused on ensuring that a high-quality legal education is available to law students, offering opportunities for young lawyers to advance their careers, and securing an environment for the practice of law that allows midcareer and senior lawyers to thrive.

Among the current challenges, there are exciting developments throughout the profession. The ABA is leading the way in many new areas of practice, including:

Elder law. This specialty is growing as baby boomers age. It requires everything from an up-to-date knowledge of relevant federal and state legislation to the skills necessary for navigating the struggles a family faces as a loved one ages.

The ABA’s Senior Lawyers Division recently teamed up with the Young Lawyers Division for an “Introduction to Elder Law” webinar. Elder-law practitioners recommend that young lawyers and law students focus initially on estate and trust law and join local bar association sections to find out how to navigate such issues as retirement and long-term care.

Space law. As private space-exploration companies take over where government agencies left off, a new world of law is opening up. The Space Law Committee of the ABA’s Section of Science and Technology Law is shifting its focus to the evolving legal, business and technical challenges. And you can now pursue a Master of Laws degree in Air & Space Law at the University of Mississippi School of Law. The first program of its kind offers a curriculum in U.S., international and comparative air and space law.

Cyberlaw. Our government, our businesses and our citizens are under attack by cyberterrorists and hackers. There is a growing need for laws that deal with issues of economic and national security. The White House recently called for a fresh look at our nation’s cybersecurity laws to prepare a federal response to any future cyberattacks, offering opportunities for our profession.

Dispute resolution. The expanding field of dispute resolution provides many lawyers with a way to be healers. Collaborative law agreements—where lawyers and clients agree that the goal is to do everything possible to keep cases out of court—are growing. Demand for mediation also is increasing. Interested lawyers can get on-the-job training by volunteering for court system programs that offer mediation as an alternative in cases from medical malpractice and probate to child protection and family matters. The ABA’s Section of Dispute Resolution is at the forefront of these issues.

Going out on your own. Solo practitioners are finding ways to thrive despite our nation’s economic difficulties because they can be flexible and responsive—as long as they pay close attention to what people need.

The ABA’s Solo, Small Firm and General Practice Division provides invaluable resources and support for lawyers going out on their own. For example, the division’s monthly teleconference and webinars offer discussions on everything from technology tips to successfully representing traffic and DUI clients.

Our legal world is changing, innovating and evolving in ways I never could have imagined when I became a lawyer. As I look around the ABA and our nation’s legal community, I am continually inspired that lawyers are armed with a passion for the law and all it represents.

The economic pressures we feel as we emerge from a recession are genuine and painful. However, we are lucky to have chosen a line of work that is so much more than a job. The ABA is here to help all lawyers—young and old, new and veteran—grow, prosper and serve.