

 **Banack's Bencher News**

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MERGER: A lengthy debate was triggered by a motion supported by the CBAO, CDLPA and MTLA to have the Law Society conduct an opinion poll of the entire Profession to determine the support for the Ontario Bar Association that would be funded by compulsory membership dues collected from all lawyers in the Province. Various groups, such as the Advocates' Society, The Criminal Lawyers Association and the Crown Attorneys Association, were opposed. Although the poll was to be non-binding, the underlying debate revolved around the constitutionality of a compulsory levy and the desirability of consulting with the Profession. The motion was strongly opposed by the lay benchers and ultimately defeated. Various proposed amendments were also defeated. It will now be up to the professional associations to regroup and determine on what, if any, basis we may be represented by a single new organization likely based on voluntary membership.

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES: Convocation considered the Treasurer's Task Force Report. It is now accepted that there may be an affiliation of a law firm with a non-lawyer firm to regularly join together for the joint promotion and delivery of their respective services to the public. The affiliated firms must be owned and controlled by lawyers and various other requirements have been imposed. If interested, you should have reference to the Task Force Report on the Law Society website (www.lsuc.on.ca).

2001 LEVY: The Law Society Levy inclusive of the General Fund, County Law Library Funding (\$210.00 per member) and the Lawyers' Fund for Client Compensation (\$379.00 per member) has been fixed at \$1,782.00. However, in order to practice next year, most Ontario lawyers will be paying \$4,582.00, inclusive of LPIC, which is \$42.00 more than last year. In fact, the previously announced LPIC savings and more have been used to offset the increased funding needed for Law Society regulatory and other functions. In particular, large increases were necessary to pay for the extra functions imposed by the amendments to the Law Society Act proclaimed last year and the prudent operation of the Compensation Fund which was reduced by \$4 million as a result of a single defalcation by an Ottawa practitioner.

BAR ADMISSION COURSE: Bar admission tuition costs increased by 10%, however, a \$450,000.00 bursary was established to assist students in difficult circumstances. As a pilot project, approximately 10 students are taking the course from various locations around the

world viewing daily lectures over the web. Negotiations with Bar-Ex may allow for the extension of this service.

GRIFFITHS' REPORT: The Report of the Honourable Mr. Justice Griffiths in respect of the Law Society Discipline Process was unanimously accepted by Convocation. In anticipation, the budget included the necessary allocation of funds to allow for the recommended additional investigative and discipline staff to ensure that complaints, investigations and, where necessary, prosecutions occur on a timely basis. Additional changes have been implemented at the staff and Benchers levels to address the concerns expressed in the Report. The Report is available for your review on the Law Society website.

CEO RESIGNATION: After five years of service, Mr. John Saso tendered his resignation effective January 6, 2001. A search for a replacement has begun.

LAWYER REFERRAL SERVICE: To recover the cost of the program, access to the Referral Service is now a 1-900 chargeable call to the public. The greatest number of calls made to this service requested names of lawyers dealing with family and estate law, followed by requests for civil litigation lawyers and thereafter in respect of labour/employment lawyers. Within the year, we should know if the service should be maintained by the Law Society.

393 UNIVERSITY AVENUE: Due to a shortage of space at Osgoode Hall, space was leased in this building to accommodate the Lawyers' Fund for Client Compensation, Spot and Focus Audit, the Client Service Call Centre and Lawyers' Referral Service, accommodating approximately 50 employees.

CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION: To date, the Law Society has provided more continuing legal education programs live and by way of video replay than in 1999. Lawyer registration has increased by 27%, however, bursaries requested by lawyers in need declined.

SPECIALIST CERTIFICATION: The purpose and ongoing commitment to the Specialist Certification Program is to be debated in Convocation. There are presently 10 areas of specialty, within which, almost 600 lawyers have been certified as specialists. The intention is that the program will be financially self-supporting.

LAW SOCIETY SYMPOSIUM: Over 500 lawyers attended a one day conference on the future of the legal profession. Outstanding speakers shared a positive, creative and challenging vision for the future of our profession. The videotape of the presentation should be available for future viewing. Congratulations to the Treasurer, Ron Manes and Law Society staff for their insight and perseverance in assembling an outstanding panel and superb program.