

Banack's Bencher News #73

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LAWYERS' TRIP TO ISRAEL: In October, 2006, a Judges' group of approximately 80 participated in a trip to Israel. It was an outstanding, insightful and one of a kind experience. With the assistance of the same tour consultant, a revised and expanded 15-day program has been planned for lawyers departing October 26, 2008. To view the detailed program, additional information, registration form and testimonials click on: www.kmlaw.ca/publications/banacks_bencher_news/LTI.pdf Participating lawyers will benefit from the breadth of the historic, cultural, religious and intellectual opportunities provided by the itinerary. Prior to departure, a summary will be provided of the details of the legal program in which you will participate. For more information or for answers to detailed travel questions, please consult the travel agent, Ms. Hindy Friedman at hfriedman@toursandtravelcentre.com.

ARTICLING ADIEU?: Convocation has authorized a consultation with the profession in order to assess the existing articling program and the current version of the bar admission course, now known as the Skills & Professional Responsibility Program. Qualified law students are graduating in increasing numbers from Ontario schools and from common-law schools abroad. This has resulted in an increase in the number of candidates registered for the Bar Admission Program and subsequently seeking articling placements. In addition two Ontario Universities have expressed an interest in establishing new law schools. Approximately 1,300 students sought articles in 2008. It is estimated that by 2009, that number will exceed 1,700. About 66% of the articles are in the GTA with approximately 16% in Ottawa and far smaller numbers in London, Hamilton and Windsor, with the balance of the province providing 5.6% of articling positions. Most of the articling jobs are in firms exceeding 11 lawyers, yet we know the preponderance of the profession throughout the province practices in smaller firms. Clearly, unless alternate strategies are developed, there may be an insufficient number of quality article placements available for candidates requiring that prerequisite in order to be called to the bar. In addition, the current iteration of the bar admission program is under scrutiny. It presently appears that neither the educational component, nor the articling program can continue in their present formulation. Difficult decisions must be made which will impact upon the training, tradition of the profession and our capacity to serve the legal needs of the public. The important Report to Convocation by the Licensing and Accreditation Task Force can be reviewed online at www.lsuc.on.ca/media/licensing.pdf.

MADAM JUSTICE CAROLE CURTIS: The Judiciary has been enhanced through the appointment of our Bencher colleague, Carole Curtis to the Ontario Court of Justice. She worked tirelessly at the Law Society in a number of areas creating vacancies that will be difficult to fill. Convocation will certainly miss her.

CHRIS BREDT (TORONTO): As a result of the vacancy created in Convocation by the judicial appointment of Carole Curtis, Christ Bredt has joined Convocation on the basis of the votes cast in the last Bencher election.

WOMEN IN PRIVATE PRACTICE: A Law Society working group diligently reviewed the practice challenges faced by women lawyers in small, medium and large-sized firms. Having considered existing initiatives and best practices, they identified nine recommendations to promote the advancement of women in the private practice of law. They include suggestions such as paid leave and locums. In 1990, only 18% of lawyers in private practice were women. That proportion increased to 29% of women lawyers in private practice in 2007. However, a larger proportion than men leave their firms within five years. Recognizing that more than half of our graduating law school classes are women, the departure of these lawyers from the profession will continue to create a very significant problem for the public's access to justice. Convocation has approved a consultation with the profession in respect of the various recommendations. The report and recommendations can be reviewed at: www.lsuc.on.ca/about/b/equity/retentionofwomen.

PARALEGAL LICENSING: The "grandparent" licensing examination for paralegals took place on January 17, 2008. Over 1,900 candidates took the examination in various centres throughout Ontario. Convocation has continued to consider and revise the Paralegal Code of Conduct in order that it parallel, to the extent possible, the Code applicable to lawyers and be ready for application when the first paralegals are granted licenses in the Spring.

HUMAN RIGHTS MONITORING GROUP: Convocation has authorized this group to explore the possibility of developing a network of organizations and work collaboratively to address human rights violations against judges and lawyers. More particularly, the monitoring group will work with the Law Society in Zimbabwe to assist it in strengthening its self-regulation capabilities and the independence of the profession. The Group requested and Convocation has approved that the Treasurer send letters to the appropriate governments highlighting injustices visited upon lawyers in Iran, Saudi Arabia and China. In this fashion, as a profession entitled to carry on our work in a free and democratic society, we have requested the governments of other nations to conform with the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers and the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

In order to more fully understand the issues facing Convocation, you may wish to review previous editions of Banack's Bencher News at http://www.kmlaw.ca/publications/banacks_bencher_news_home.aspx.

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