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Phila. Trial Lawyer Leader Trains Focus On Young Lawyers

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Of the Legal Staff

Early in his career, Raynes Lawn Hehmeyer attorney Timothy Lawn was mentored by leaders from both the plaintiffs and defense bars, and now, after recently taking over as head of the Philadelphia Trial Lawyers Association, he hopes to use those experiences to boost mentorship programs for young Philadelphia lawyers.

Lawn took over as head of the Philadelphia Trial Lawyers Association on July 1.

Despite getting off to a somewhat slow start due to a massive water main break that flooded portions of Center City, Lawn has been busy. And with efforts underway to enhance mentorships for young lawyers and increase communication with state legislators, court administrators and members of the defense bar, Lawn said he expects the coming year to be even busier.

The Legal spoke with Lawn about how he has been settling in since taking over the leadership role, and about what he plans to accomplish.

Q: What have you been doing since you took over as president of the PTLA?

A: Well, we got off to an inauspicious start. The new PTLA offices are in the old Fidelity Building [123 S. Broad St.], so we were victim to that water main break. For a few days the executive staff was unable to physically get in the building, but we're back in place and everything's up and running. Otherwise, what we've been busy with is there's a lot of legislative house seats that are coming up with elections in November. I've personally been busy talking with various candidates about their various positions and things that are important to the plaintiffs' bar.

Q: What are you trying to gain with these discussions?

A: It's more just to get an understanding on where people stand on the big issues that not only affect us

but the issues that affect all attorneys, like making sure we keep an independent judiciary, or any proposed tax on legal services.

What's unique to plaintiffs' bar is that our mission is to protect not only our clients, but future victims of negligence, and to keep the courthouse doors open. There are always efforts in Harrisburg, some subtle, some not so subtle, to change that, and we have an interest to make sure that does not happen.

We're in a unique position where, the teacher's union has representatives, the Chamber of Commerce has their representative. Our victims come from all walks. There's not one unified person, or group that can represent their own interests. We represent heads of business to 4-year-olds without any means. It's the trial lawyer that has to speak for them. Our clients come from all walks of life. No one expects to be a victim until it's them. We are the only ones that can carry that message, and we take it very seriously.

Q: Are there any specific legislative issues you're planning on watching this year?

A: It seems like, for the last few years, tax on legal services have arisen out there at one stage or another. And right towards ends of June, a vote was taken on capping punitive damages in nursing home cases. Fortunately, did not pass. But we expect that and other immunity bills will raise their head from time to time. Those are the things we'll have to keep on our radar.

We're also always trying to educate the legislature. That's how I view my job: to educate legislators about the unintended consequences. Sometimes they are trying to solve one thing, but that can cause some unintended consequences. We're a bipartisan organization, so it's not a Democrat or Republican issue. It's an issue of what's fair. I'm proud of the fact we're a bipartisan organization. Our principal concern is all people, no matter their walk of life, to ensure they have access to a fair and impartial jury to settle their disputes.

Q: What are you planning to focus on in the coming year?

A: We are in a very well-run organization. We're very strong, and we've had great leadership over the years, so part of my job is to not screw this up because it is in very good shape [laughs]. But the other part of job is to carry out mission. As someone who started out doing defense, I have some perspective on where our brethren on the defense bar are. I've spoken to Bob Cosgrove at the [Philadelphia Association of Defense Counsel] and the court, and we'd like to try to continue our good relationship with the PADC and the court, and to see that we're doing all we can do that helps with the effective administration of justice that's been in place here for many years.

Other initiatives include enhancing our mentoring. I'm someone who believes in the value of mentorship. I began working with Dan Ryan and John O'Brien at O'Brien & Ryan, and then I switched sides in 1996 and began working with [S. Gerald] Jerry Litvin. I've greatly benefited from having excellent mentorship, and that's something I'd like to see us get a little better at.

We know how difficult it is for young lawyers to get the trial experience they need, and that's something I'd like to see us address. We'd like to increase our pro bono work. That gives young lawyers courtroom experience, and I would like to see more of our CLEs be geared towards bringing on trial lawyers.

I've benefitted from working under some great trial lawyers, and I feel an obligation to try to bring them along.

It's already been started in our organization last year. Larry Bendesky tried to develop that with a liaison to law schools to explain what we do and why young lawyers should have an interest in what we do.

Q: Are there any big hurdles you anticipate in the coming year?

A: I don't anticipate any hurdles. We have a very strong cohesive group.

TIM LAWN

We work well together. We've always worked well together. We're looking forward to working with the defense bar and the court administration on things that could be mutually beneficial to all of us. This is also our 60th year, so we're going to have a lot of exciting things in the spring to memorialize that. But we have an excellent executive director, who's been with us for 30 years, Pat Patterson, so I don't expect any hurdles.

Q: Just a few months ago your firm, formerly Raynes McCarty, changed its name to Raynes Lawn Hehmeyer. How has it been assuming two leadership roles in such a short timeframe?

A: It's been a crazy busy year. But the name change, we'd been talking about it for several months before we rolled it out in March. Steve [Raynes] said it was his father's firm, but he wanted [the name] to honor [the new leadership]. I was obviously flattered by that. But it's not a big change. Frankly, I've been fortunate that Steve has involved me in more of the leadership responsibilities here at the firm. But I'm up for it. I've never shied away from work.

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