

Step Out in Style, Step Up in Service

OBA's YLD Invites You To Celebrate Those Who Walk the Walk at February 20 Awards Gala



By Noelle Thornburg Hoeft
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For over 125 years, the Omaha Bar Association has been a source of support and service for and among those in the Omaha legal community. It's the OBA behind some of our city's most popular and relevant programs and events that have become perennial mainstays on the calendars of so many. The Lawyer Referral Service, the annual Law Day awards luncheon, Lawyers in the Classroom – not to mention the various continuing legal education (CLE) programs and socials like the annual wine tasting held just last week – surely one could say this organization's covered it all, right?

And now the budding minds of the Young Lawyers Division, an OBA subset comprised of about 400 of its 1,600 members, thought to do something no one else before them ever had. As OBA YLD Division Chair Angela Lennon explained, "'Stepping Out in Style' – A Gala Evening will combine dinner and dancing with an awards program, along with a pledge drive to encourage lawyers to 'step up' and commit to volunteering service hours with various opportunities available in our legal community."

She said, "We're excited to develop an event that is focused on the OBA as an organization and to honor and give thanks to those in our community whose efforts further the mission of the OBA" which, according to its website, is "to increase the usefulness, activity, professionalism and influence of the Bar and the legal profession."

So many "have had such an impact" in keeping the mission alive, that when Lennon and the YLD's executive council approached the OBA executive committee about the idea, it wasn't a hard sell. "They were VERY supportive of our group starting the gala event!" Lennon said.

With no precedent for such an award, it also wasn't an arduous task to choose its inaugural recipients. The award selection process happened pretty organically, but not without foresight by both councils.

"It was definitely a collaborative effort between the YLD and the executive board, and we tried to make the selection process sustainable for the future," she said.

OBA President John Menicucci agreed, "We hope that it can become a great annual tradition. The executive council and I are excited and grateful to Angela Lennon and the YLD for founding the event, and their energy and efforts planning and organizing it."

The gala's theme, "Stepping Out in Style," is fraught with meaning. Most obviously, attendees are encouraged to wear their most funky, fun and fashionable footwear to complement their semi-formal cocktail attire; and yes, there will be a contest for those who show up adorned with the best kicks. There will be a first-ever awards presentation to recognize the 2016 recipients of the OBA Outstanding Volunteer Awards. But perhaps even more importantly, the OBA is looking to its members to 'step up' and make 2016 "The Year of the Volunteer" by pledging to complete 1,000 hours of community service.

"We hope this event and pledge drive will further help to engage our members and foster leadership and development opportunities for our young lawyers," Lennon said.

Since its inception a few years ago, the Young Lawyers Division has been instrumental in involving lawyers that are young in age, young in years of practice, or both, Menicucci said. "It has been a tremendous asset to the OBA as a program through which young lawyers can hone their leadership skills while serving the legal community."

YLD membership is free and automatic for all OBA members either under the age of 36, or with five or fewer years in law practice. It is led by an executive council comprised of YLD members including two law students: one from Creighton University School of Law, and one member from the University of Nebraska – Lincoln College of Law. Since 2012, the YLD has made a name for itself as a key group focused on providing space for young lawyers to serve. Look for several YLD-hosted CLEs in 2016, as well as more social events as the year goes on – some for the higher purpose of serving others, some just for fun.

As for the gala, it's sure to be a feel-good fusion of both fun times and philanthropy, so don't put off getting your tickets; they need to be purchased by Friday, Feb. 12 and will not be available at the door. Speaking of doors – if you haven't yet attended an event at the newly renovated Pella at Blackstone, in the heart of midtown Omaha's antiquarian chic Blackstone district, you're in for an architectural treat. With the spirited Sean Conway as your master of ceremonies, dinner, dancing and a great cause, what are you waiting for? Dig deep in that closet and find that fancy footwear!

For more information about “Stepping Out in Style” – A Gala Evening, or to make your 1,000-hour pledge before the gala, please go to: www.omahabarassociation.com, or contact OBA Executive Director Dave Sommers at 402-280-3607 or dave@omahabarassociation.com.