

VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

Announcing the Inaugural TIPS Section Conference

Michael W. Drumke

It is my privilege to serve as TIPS's chair for the 2014–2015 bar year, and we have a number of exciting initiatives planned for the months ahead. The biggest of these initiatives will be our inaugural Section Conference, scheduled for April 29–May 1, 2015, at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Philadelphia.



PHOTO: ISTOCK

Why is TIPS producing more CLE? There are many reasons, some of which start with the way the ABA Annual Meeting has changed. When I was a young lawyer back in the early 1990s, I attended my first ABA Annual Meeting. My then mentor and I picked up our registration packets and sat down over a cup of coffee to formulate our “plan of attack” for the meeting. In those years, you paid one low price for all the CLE programming you could consume. The various ABA Sections put on all kinds of programs that an aspiring trial lawyer like myself wanted to attend. Programs on best practices for persuading judges, trial techniques, improving client service, and the like were plentiful and priced to sell. After we figured out which programs we would attend, we split up to hit the

various Section “bookstores” where you picked up the written materials for your CLE choices. At the time, everything was still printed in hard copy, so you would collect stacks of papers and books that would eventually measure a couple of feet in height and weigh 10 pounds or more. Thankfully, the digital revolution arrived in time to save the discs in our lower backs, and within a few years, program materials were placed on more portable CD-ROMS. Unfortunately, the reasonably-priced CLE smorgasbord format disappeared along with printed materials when the ABA changed its pricing formula for CLE at the Annual Meeting soon after moving to digitized program materials.

The reasons for changing the Annual Meeting format and adopting a pricing structure based on a per-program charge are more involved than I can address in the space available here. I will simply note that ABA leadership is now in the process of trying to address some of the Annual Meeting issues, and TIPS has voiced its support of those efforts. It seems likely that changing the format and pricing structure adversely impacted Annual Meeting attendance over the past years. To be fair, there are a number of reasons why the Annual Meeting no longer draws the same number of lawyers it once did, but eliminating the option for members to pay just one low price for a pass to all the CLE programs they might wish to attend was probably one of them.



Another key issue regarding the ABA Annual Meeting is that many of the CLE programs focus on niche practice areas or subjects, but they are presented at a meeting attended by thousands of members from across the entire ABA. In contrast, groups like the American Medical Association take a broader approach, offering annual meeting programs that address issues such as “the evolving role of the physician” and “what payment reform means for your practice.” Programs relating to pathology or radiology, for example, are left to those specialty groups to address at other, more narrowly focused meetings.

Several years ago, TIPS's leadership, through our Council, decided that the Section ought to have its own meeting at which our members could gather together, attend a number of broad-based programs on topics and emerging issues in a variety of TIPS's legal practice areas, and have opportunities to network with one another. That decision has led to the development of our first Section Conference, which will be geared toward TIPS's core membership of trial lawyers and insurance attorneys. The staff counsel, corporate counsel, government lawyers, judges, and plaintiffs' counsel who are part of the overall Section membership all have practices that involve trial or insurance work, or both. The Section Conference planning committee is developing “tracks” of programming

that will have broad application, designed to appeal to a wide variety of TIPS members—as well as people we would like to have as TIPS members, including young lawyers. The tracks in development will be composed of programs dealing with trial techniques, insurance, law practice management, corporate counsel, ethics, fair funding for our courts, and technology—including programs on the hot-button issues of cybersecurity and privacy.

The Section Conference will offer multiple opportunities to network with colleagues and speakers. TIPS will host receptions on each of the first two nights and a gala dinner event on Friday evening, May 1, at the National Constitution Center, a historic non-partisan civic education headquarters that is home to the Museum of We The People and America's Town Hall. In addition, there will be a Leadership Luncheon at the Ritz-Carlton on Friday afternoon. The pricing for the CLE and the two receptions is being formulated as I write this, but it will be all-inclusive and set at a price point that we hope will be attractive to TIPS members and non-TIPS

members alike. The room rate at the Ritz-Carlton, which is scheduled for a “soft makeover” this winter, also will be attractive. Philadelphia, the site of the First Continental Congress in 1774 and the first capital of our nation, is a city rich in legal and political history and the home of many TIPS members. It is the perfect place to launch our first Section Conference.

TIPS is delighted to welcome our friends from the ABA Judicial Division, who will be holding their annual planning meeting in Philadelphia in conjunction with our Section Conference. We will conduct a joint program with members of the Judicial Division on Friday and will be honored to welcome their participation in our events, including the TIPS Leadership Luncheon and our gala dinner at the Constitution Center.

Returning to the basic concept that made the former ABA Annual Meeting model such a success makes a lot of sense in an increasingly frenetic profession where budgets are stretched, lawyers are overworked, and all of us want and need meetings where we can get practical programming, network with colleagues and

clients, and develop professionally.

One of the things that TIPS does best is CLE meetings and programming. Our regular slate of outstanding stand-alone CLE meetings offered by the Section's general committees will continue this year, as those programs remain focused on the specialized subjects that Section members practicing in those areas are seeking. If you are a lawyer focused on aviation law, life insurance law, health and disability insurance law, employee benefits and employment law, fidelity and surety law, insurance coverage litigation, commercial transportation law, motor vehicle product liability, toxic torts and environmental law, or property insurance law, I encourage you to attend the mid-winter or spring meeting sponsored by the TIPS committee in your field. But the place for all TIPS members to be this bar year will be at the Ritz-Carlton in Philadelphia starting on Wednesday, April 29, 2015, for the first-ever TIPS Section Conference. I hope to see you and your friends in Philadelphia! ■



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