

PRESIDENT'S PAGE

by Erica Moeser

This October the NCBE Board of Trustees plans to devote one day of its fall meeting to a retreat-type experience, and as is common, one of the themes will be “where have we been and where are we going?” In the process of preparing discussion questions and materials for the board, I have had cause to reflect on NCBE as it existed when I climbed aboard in October 1994 and where the organization finds itself in 2011.

In 1994 NCBE occupied 11,000 square feet of space in a downtown location on the corner of Wacker and North Michigan in Chicago, just across the river from the Tribune Tower. We had no professional finance person on staff to oversee the books. We had no IT capabilities. Our technology support consisted of having a fellow who moonlighted on Sundays come down to the empty office to run a backup of our system (if one could call it that). Our testing department consisted of one lawyer located in California who was supported part-time by a Chicago employee.

And oh, that computer system. On my arrival, what we had in place was a system so inadequate that while one could type on it and print things out, one could not store any information; hence it was retyped—and retyped. Contact addresses for investigative reports that we generated by the thousands were entered three times—on arrival, when correspondence was prepared, and when a summary of responses was composed. Not a single address could



be retrieved. There was no e-mail—I opened a personal account on AOL to communicate with the outside world.

Of course, I was no great shakes at technology myself. At the Wisconsin Board of Bar Examiners from whence I came, we approached the acquisition of our first fax machine with great suspicion in the mid-1980s. And I remember letting my first desktop computer at the office sit for a while before I ventured to press the on/off button. Proving that an old dog can indeed master one or two new tricks, though, I grasped that things needed to change at NCBE, and change they did with the full support of the boards that have seen us through to the present day.

My philosophy throughout all the changes has been fairly simple. I believe that NCBE should operate as leanly as possible—much as I learned to do during the 17 years with state government that preceded my time here—while remaining rock solid in the organization’s ability to deliver what is needed on time and with excellence. If we are to be a service organization that can truly support boards of bar examiners and the courts they serve, we need to be able to deliver strong educational programming, worthwhile publications, timely and complete investigative reports, and—perhaps most of all—impeccable testing services.

The greatest major change to occur at NCBE over the last decade has been the importing of all

our test development operations in-house. While we still use an outside vendor to handle the registrations and test administration and scoring for the MPRE, every other scrap of work connected to the four tests (the MBE, MEE, MPT, and MPRE) is handled by NCBE staff members. In addition, the testing staff has created test preparation materials that are useful in delivering authentic test materials to admission candidates at low cost. (We think this meets a need, as many students struggle with debt after completing law school.) Finally, we have created a research arm to assist jurisdictions directly with such things as scoring challenges and cheating analyses, and to look at more esoteric measurement questions that keep us in the mainstream of the testing disciplines.

Technology has revolutionized the way we do business in all aspects of our operation, and we have moved from having the one moonlighter show up on Sunday afternoons (I still shudder at that thought) to a staff of eight professionals who support testing and research projects, investigations, educational events, publications, financial operations, and corporate work. (This is hardly unusual—many bar admissions offices have embraced and harnessed technology.)

The overarching change, I suppose, is that NCBE has moved from being an organization that was largely volunteer-driven to one that has professionalized. This mirrors what has occurred for many boards of bar examiners across the country, as the process of bar admissions has become more demanding, more sophisticated, and fraught with challenges unheard-of in the halcyon days.

So in October the board will be sizing up what responsibilities we currently meet and imagining the directions in which the organization should move as we pass the 80-year mark attained this year and place the centennial in our sights. I look forward to mapping the uncharted territory of the future.

On other pages of this issue of the magazine, readers will find mention of NCBE's Annual Meeting held in Boulder on August 11–14. The Annual Meeting brings together both NCBE's board and its committee chairs as well as the membership of NCBE's Council of Bar Admission Administrators. The meeting marks the finish of the July bar examinations around the country (yes, grading still awaits), a stressful time in the life of every administrator. (Did I mention that I administered my last bar examination in July 1994 and that some of the memories still haunt me?)

The Annual Meeting also marks the transition in leadership for both NCBE and the CBAA. Phil Madden of California, a kind man with all the positive features of a laid-back Californian, relinquished the NCBE gavel to Rebecca Thiem, an energetic and earnest lawyer from the North Dakota tundra. Dave Ewert, an Iowan whose wit carried him through an interesting year for the CBAA, is succeeded by John McAlary, the New York administrator who managed to test 15,588 applicants in 2010 and make it look easy.

I look forward to working with Rebecca and John as they carry out their offices until we convene for the next Annual Meeting in Burlington, Vermont, in August 2012. 📅