



YLS President's Column
By Chris Wirken

Change. It has been a key word in our recent presidential election. What change can KCMBA expect of YLS in 2009? In many ways, there is very little change to bring about as YLS continues their success through its' various committees, projects and services. In other ways, however, there are changes, developments and lingering issues that YLS will strive to work out in the coming year.

A prominent issue within the Association of late has been managing surpluses of YLS Public Service Funds. These funds were generated from the Golf Fundraiser Tournaments organized by Chris Lawler in '07 and Athena Brackman-Dickson in '08. Instead of losing these funds to the Association's annual non-profit accounting and taxation format, YLS was able to maintain extensive public service funds for future programs through the aid of the KCMBA Administration and the KC Metro Bar Foundation.

Since saving these funds in the Foundation, past presidents Walter Brown and Jo Leigh Wagoner-Fischer have begun to formalize the procedures and parameters whereby the money can be utilized. There are issues throughout KCMBA, however, which have frustrated their efforts. Specifically, the Association issues include defining terms (such as "public service") and clarifying the scope of the Strategic Vision Committee and procedures for the recently formed Finance and Investment Committee. KCMBA and YLS anticipate a speedy resolution to these matters.

While serving on the Strategic Vision Committee, I've participated in extensive discussions to define "public service." Discussions stemmed around whether one definition can truly fit the varied forms of service programs and charitable donations that the Association can provide. Recently, I reviewed convoluted, multi-page definitions created by other bar associations. I am confident we can create a clear and concise definition for our Association and its' future work.

The analysis of these issues has not prevented YLS from moving forward with making use of these funds. Recently, YLS professionally recorded our Goldie Locks Trial at the UMKC Law School Court room with a jury and audience of local grade school students. This video will be edited and produced in DVD format to distribute to area schools throughout the metro area. This project was created by YLS Special Projects members Marti Seaton, Staci Porto, Molly Bartalos, Maureen Brady, and Jo Leigh Wagoner-Fischer and additional funding provided by an ABA Grant and some of the '07 Public Service Funds within the KCMBF.

YLS, due to the efforts of Besty Blake, received preliminary approval to cooperate with Debate KC (Developing Empowerment By Argument Thought & Engagement – Kansas City). The mission of Debate-KC is to increase academic performance and opportunities for urban students through debate. Through this program, YLS will provide volunteers to aid in the city debate championship for 200-300 high school and junior high students. YLS will also provide the participants lunch and a presentation of our Choose Law Program. This YLS program further aids in our Diversity Initiative in that 86% of the Debate KC participants are minorities and 62% are female. Finally, YLS will fund 2 scholarships to the winning debate team for a two-week summer debate camp at UMKC. This program is a great opportunity that integrates so many of the KCMBA's programs and interests.

YLS is also working on approval of a program with Lawyers Encouraging Academic Performance (LEAP) in partnership with Operation Breakthrough to provide Study Buddies. YLS members will develop one-on-one rapport with children, aiding in schoolwork, reading and general friendship one afternoon each week.



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Through another American Bar Association grant, YLS will soon wrap up their Law Week Poster Contest for local grade school students. In 2008, we celebrated the 50 year anniversary of Law Day a "day of national dedication to the principle of government under law" established by President Eisenhower. The poster competition seeks designs integrating the history and mission of Law Day. The winning student's design earns a pizza party for their entire class.

I would like to take this opportunity to encourage all KCMBA members of two things: first, attend our social events; and second, bring a non-KCMBA lawyer to the event to demonstrate the value of membership in our Association. We are all representatives of our Association—let's not lose track of that fact. Let us all give a little more.

There are a multitude of other exciting programs developing in YLS. I look forward to your suggestions, your participation and your help. Most importantly, thanks to each of you for volunteering your time and energy to serving your profession and the public as lawyers through KCMBA.