

News Brief

Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers, Minnesota's Lawyers Assistance Program
Free and confidential services provided by lawyers & judges for members of the legal profession

FEBRUARY 2003

UPCOMING LCL PRESENTATIONS

- Law Schools: U.S.T. Law School - A brief presentation on LCL will be made to the entire initial class on March 4. Wm. Mitchell Law School - One hour presentations will be made on C.D. (with [REDACTED]) and on mental health issues (with Steve Gordon) on March 17 and April 14, respectively. U of M Law School - A presentation to a section of P.R. course is scheduled for April 21.
- LCL is sponsoring a 2 hour CLE in conjunction with the Iron Range Bar Assoc. on March 13. Please check our website for additional CLE course offerings.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Another interactive workshop will take place at noon on March 21. It will address **career planning and career transition issues** and will be held in the Court International Conference Room. Presenting will be Joan Bibelhausen, J.D., of Career Management Consultants. It is offered at no charge, but pre-registration is required.
- The first *Women Lawyers' Life Balance Group* and the first *Lawyers' Mental Health Therapy Group* are both being very well received by the participants. Additional groups are being formed. If you are interested in learning more about these groups or in participating, please call the LCL office.

SUPPORT GROUPS

LAWYERS AA:

- Minneapolis – Tuesday and Thursday; noon (M.S.B.A. Office);
- St. Paul – Monday, 12:15 pm; (Ramsey County Court House);
- Other AA Meetings – Fridays, 7:00 am at Perkins on France & 494 Mondays, noon at Silver Spoon on 67th and Penn. Avenue.

LAWYERS MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT GROUPS:

- Minneapolis – 1st and 3rd Thursday, 6:30 p.m. (M.S.B.A. Office)
- St. Paul – 2nd and 4th Tuesday, 6:30 p.m. (LCL Office)

UPCOMING NOON LCL MEETINGS (Please let the office know if you would like to receive reminders of the membership meetings and the opportunity to order a box lunch. There is also a deli on site with sandwiches, salad bar, and soup.)

Wed., March 19—Dirk Miller, the Emily Program (outpatient treatment for eating disorders)
April—Date to be set based on availability of Johnny Allem, C.E.O., Johnson Institute

APPLICANTS SOUGHT FOR LCL BOARD.

At the February Board meeting, Chair [REDACTED] appointed an Officers and Directors Nominations Committee. The committee is comprised of [REDACTED] Chair elect [REDACTED] and Director [REDACTED].

If you are interested in serving as an Officer of LCL or on the Board of Directors, please indicate your interest in writing to the Nominations Committee (addressed to the LCL office). If you have questions about the responsibilities involved in being a director, please call the office and we will send you the document adopted by the Board as part of the Strategic Planning Process, "Role of an Individual Board Member."

THE HEALING POWER OF LAUGHTER

by Brenda Kittilson

No matter how often I hear it, I benefit from being reminded of the healing power of laughter. I can get wrapped up in circumstances; then bogged down in worries and frustration. Laughter and humor help me to re-balance, to re-gain perspective. In the counseling or treatment field, where we deal with very serious matters, I need to especially remember not to take life too seriously. I think the same would be true in the law profession.

Whether it's in parenting, the work environment, a relationship with one's spouse or partner; humor and laughter are not only gifts, they are integral to maintaining a healthy perspective. When used appropriately (of key importance), humor can lighten and brighten the good in life as well as diffuse the most tense of situations. In parenting, a potential power struggle can evaporate with well-placed and respectful humor.

There are many ways to reconnect with the humorous side of life. These include jokes or funny stories (I may not remember exactly what was said, but I WILL remember how good the laughter felt!), cartoons, comedy clubs, movies, plays (Brave New Workshop is my favorite), and books. Better yet, share the experience by including friends or loved ones.

In checking the internet for either 'humor' or 'laughter in healing,' I found two sites that may be of interest. You may enjoy checking:

1. "The Humor Project, Inc." (www.humorproject.com). It included an article titled "Top Ten List: Ten Ways to Infiltrate Humor Into Your Company or Organization," based on a book by Dr. Roger Andersen, author of *Some Days You're The Pigeon...Some Days You're The Statue*. The specific suggestions may not be right for you, but may lead you to come up with your own ideas of how to make your work setting a happier one.
2. "Laugh Yourself Calm," by Cathleen Henning (<http://panicdisorder.about.com/library/week->

MEMBERSHIP STATUS/VOLUNTEER QUESTIONNAIRE UPDATE

The questionnaires that were sent out with the membership mailing in December are continuing to trickle in. We've received feedback from some members indicating that their questionnaire got lost in the crush of holiday mail. If you haven't yet submitted a questionnaire and would like to, but just can't find it, call or email the LCL office and we'll be happy to send another one out to you. (If you can't remember if you submitted one or not, please don't hesitate to call and check. Not remembering those kinds of things may only mean you're qualified to be executive director, if my characteristics have any impact on the job specs.)

LAWYER'S BOARD UPDATE (part 1)

Ken Jorgenson, recently promoted Executive Director of the Office of Lawyers' Professional Responsibility, spoke at the February LCL Membership Meeting. Ken has worked at the OLPR since before he became an attorney over 20 years ago.

Ken opened his remarks by commenting on the comfort he felt in seeing several attorneys he knew at our LCL meeting. When he recognizes attorneys in meetings, generally, it's because of their involvement as charged parties in misconduct proceedings. At the LCL meeting, he knew attorneys who have demonstrated the commitment of the Minnesota bar to self-regulation through their participation on ethics committees, as supervising attorneys, and by serving on the Board.

The Minnesota Bar

The Minnesota bar's commitment to self-regulation was one of the themes Ken addressed. He indicated that many of the eastern states are incredulous at the level of participation by the Minnesota bar in regulating attorney conduct. Ken is often asked where and how he gets attorneys to take the time to serve on ethics committees and, for no pay, to supervise attorneys on probation. The trend in many states is toward less self-regulation, leaving all regulatory work to staff attorneys.

Another example of why he respects the Minnesota bar is the response to the board's advisory opinion service. When Ken first started with the board as a law student, he was drafting advisory opinions for staff attorneys' signatures. In the first year the service was offered, about 56 opinions were requested and provided. Since then, the number of opinions has grown to over 1800 per year. Ken feels that is one of the reasons that the number of misconduct complaints has not increased over the last few years from about 1300 per year, despite the substantial increase in the number of practicing attorneys.

State Budget Cuts

Ken also provided some information on the impact the 10% budget cut proposed by the Governor could have on the state court system. Discussion with court administrative personnel indicate that all levels of courts would be affected, with as many as 30% of the court's personnel facing layoff. (This number is much higher than the budget cut because of the severance costs associated with layoffs and because the courts must also absorb another dramatic increase in health insurance costs.) Some are suggesting closing courthouses on Fridays, as has been done in another state, and ending some programs altogether, such as conciliation court.

There will also be an impact at the lawyers' board. Ken feels they may have to discontinue the advisory opinion service. As an alternative, they may try to create a data base that would allow attorneys to engage in more self-help on-line.

Another concern for LCL will be the impact of the state budget on the Supreme Court's plans to address chemical dependency issues in the legal system. Last fall, Chair [REDACTED] and I attended a conference put on by the Court titled "Ending the Disconnect, Advancing the Dialogue: Innovative Judicial Interventions in Chemical Health." It will be most unfortunate if the budget crisis jeopardizes the Court's ability to follow up on that initiative.

Ken also addressed his view of the interplay between the lawyers' board and LCL. That will be the subject of an article in next month's Newsbrief.



LAWYERS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM OF LCL

The Lawyers Assistance Program offers free, confidential help to lawyers, judges and law students affected by stress, depression and other mental health problems and/or chemical dependency which may impair their ability to perform competently and professionally. LCL has contracted with TEAM, Inc. to provide services including short term counseling, crisis assessment and referral on a 24-hour basis.

LCL (651) 646-5590 or (866) 525-6466
TEAM, Inc. (651) 642-0182 or (800) 634-7710

ly/aa040799.htm). This site is of specific interest to anyone experiencing panic or anxiety disorders. It cites Patty Wooten, RN BSN, (from her article *Humor: An Antidote for Stress*) for the proposition that "positive emotions can create neurochemical changes that will buffer the immunosuppressive effects of stress." Wooten also states, "Some initial studies have shown that laughter actually can increase our sense of control, a benefit to people with anxiety disorders who often feel so out of control." Another article referenced by Henning is *30 Ways to Handle Stress*. This article offers "mental health humor" as "an unconventional approach to stress relief." Henning concludes, "Start with a smile, add a little chuckle, and soon you'll be laughing the stress away."

Another example of the healing power of laughter is found in the movie "Patch Adams." It stars Robin Williams as a medical student who discovered how laughter helped in dealing with his own major depression.

How can an article on the healing power of laughter not include some humor of its own? I have taken a couple of the jokes Dave Hewitt included in his 'Online Comedy Reporter' (a feature of the "READER'S DIJEST" section at The Humor Project, Inc.'s website). The first is "a classic correction from The Santa Rosa Press-Democrat: 'A story on page B1 Tuesday misspelled the name of the second place winner in the Sonoma County elementary spelling competition'." The second: "Those of you absorbed back into the workforce missed an absorbing Oprah Winfrey show this week. Monday she talked to a woman 'with multiple personalities who stalked herself.'"

If you read this article and it triggered a smile as you recalled a funny joke, story or situation, I encourage you to remember to make that more a part of your life and to share your laughter with others, it'll help to heal whatever ails either of you!

