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Photo by Bob Gigliore

Steven Eisman leads the Nassau County Bar Association

Attorney Steven Eisman was installed as the 113th president of the Mineola-based Nassau County Bar Association last week. As an executive partner at Abrams & Fensterman in Lake Success, Eisman co-chairs the firm's divorce and family law practice and is its matrimonial law and senior litigator. He has been an active member of NCBA for more than three decades, and as a bar leader he faces the nationwide issue of declining membership. Eisman talked with LIBN about how to address this and other issues facing the association and offered his thoughts on everything from how to bridge gaps between attorneys and judges to the portrayal of lawyers on television.

What is a top issue facing the Nassau County Bar Association that you want to address as its new president? There is nothing more daunting facing all bar leaders nationwide than the issue of declining membership. Law school admissions are down as are employment opportunities for young lawyers. It is critical for the health and future of our association that our established members interact with our younger members and law student members.

What are some of the accomplishments of your predecessor, John McEntee, that you hope to continue? John undertook the task of identifying necessary repairs in our building, the home of our association since 1931. He guided the board through the process of hiring an owner's representative and securing the funds necessary to preserve our building for future generations. The construction will occur during my administration. His unwavering commitment to the Lawyers Assistance Program, a service that provides counseling to lawyers in need, as well as protecting the clients of lawyers who are unable to attend to their practice due to death or other disability, resulted in procurement of the funds necessary to continue this vital program. I intend to continue to focus on this important program.

What is the gap between young lawyers and members of the judiciary that you've said you want to bridge? Most young lawyers who enter a courtroom at the beginning of a ca-

reer feel overwhelmed by the experience of addressing a jurist who they know by name and reputation only. This feeling is only reinforced when the young lawyers observe the interaction between the court and the attorneys who they are familiar with. Any opportunity a young lawyer has to interact with a judge outside of a courtroom setting is a positive experience for both parties.

How has NCBA changed during the 35 years you have been an active member? The most significant change is the growth of the We Care Committee, which was established by Steve Gassman during his tenure as president 26 years ago. That committee is comprised of judges and lawyers who spend countless hours raising funds to support charities on Long Island. As a result of the growth of the golf classic, led by and named for member attorney Steve Schlissel, that committee now raises hundreds of thousands of dollars a year with 100 percent of every dollar raised going to charity.

Are there any significant differences in practicing law in Nassau County compared to Suffolk? Nothing significant other than the clientele perhaps.

How are sole practitioners faring on Long Island? The success of sole practitioners is, to a certain extent, dependent upon their area of expertise. There are more law firms of significant size on Long Island than

there were 25 years ago. Many solo practitioners have become a part of a larger enterprise. However, there are still a great many attorneys who prefer a smaller environment where they can manage a general practice for a select clientele. Our association boasts an active committee chaired by attorney Gary Port, which focuses on the needs and concerns of the general, solo and small firm practices.

Why did you want to become a lawyer? I was inspired to become a lawyer as a result of watching television shows as a child, such as "Perry Mason," "The Defenders" and "Harrigan and Son." My mother was also a legal secretary, and I was fascinated by the idea of representing clients. It is truly the only career I ever considered.

What do you think of how attorneys are portrayed on television and in the movies? I have no problem with the portrayal of attorneys on television and in the movies provided that the public understands that this is entertainment and not reality. Atticus Finch, as portrayed by Gregory Peck in "To Kill a Mockingbird," is probably much more realistic than William Shatner as Denny Crane in "Boston Legal," yet both are equally entertaining. The bigger problem is the suggestion that the client retains the attorney in the morning and is on trial in the afternoon. Simply not true. In the real world, the wheels of justice grind slowly.

Why practice matrimonial law? I didn't set out to be a matrimonial lawyer. I was originally trained as a criminal defense attorney. In the late 1980s, I had a partner who handled matrimonial cases, but was not a trial attorney. I tried one case and obtained a favorable result for the client, and I also enjoyed the challenge the case presented. Over a short period of time, I had developed a matrimonial practice and during the next few years, I chose to focus my practice in that area.

Three of your children are attorneys or studying law. How has their father inspired or influenced their decisions? I actually discouraged my children from attending law school, unsuccessfully, I might add. As a matrimonial attorney, I have the opportunity to observe the many different ways people earn a living. The practice of law is a service business and, if you excel, it is your personal services that each client is looking for. There are a multitude of businesses that have a different dynamic. Each of my older three children ignored me and pursued a legal education. Anyway, I guess I did inspire them. I am proud of all three of them. My youngest is entering her senior year at Northwestern University studying radio, movies and television in the School of Communications. She promises me that she will never be a lawyer, though she may one day write a show or movie depicting life in a family of lawyers.

— JOSEPH KELLARD

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