

In This Issue

- Council Update
- From the Council Chair
- Treasurer's Report
- Recent & Upcoming GPSSF Section CLEs
- GPSSF Technology
- Maintaining a Healthy Practice
- Time-Saving Tips
- Committee Volunteers Needed
- Resources Available for Pro Bono Work
- Section Webpage, Contact Information, & Much More

Council Update: Your New Section Council

In August this past summer, the General Practice, Solo & Small Firm (GPSSF) Section elected several new faces to the Section's Council. The first meeting of the new Council took place in September, at which time the Council selected its leaders for 2008/2009 term; they are as follows:

Chair:	Adam W. Heaton	Vice Chair:	Allison L. Marshall
Secretary:	Ellen M. Murphy Fritsch	Treasurer:	Helen M. Federline

The following comprise the remaining members of the Section's Council:

Donald W. Niles	Bonnie S. Westlin
Robert A. Woodke	Thomas A. Borash

Unfortunately for the Section, Councilmember Trent C. Jaeger has accepted an in-house counsel position and will not be able to serve the remaining portion of his term on the Section Council.



From the Council Chair

By Adam W. Heaton

The stated purpose of the GPSSF Section is to "to enhance the skills of lawyers engaged in the general practice of law and to provide means whereby general practitioners may share their wide breadth of experience to improve their own practice, educate themselves and their fellow practitioners, improve the legal profession, and thus benefit the general public." *Art. 1, Sec. 2, GPSSF Bylaws.*

Consider for a moment that a very significant number of practicing attorneys in Minnesota provide legal counsel as either a solo practitioner or through a law firm with fifteen or fewer licensed attorneys. Surprisingly, however, out of the nearly 19,000 members of the MSBA, as of July 2008 the GPSSF Section only had 333 members. Why is this? Perhaps solo and small firm practitioners have not been convinced that membership in the GPSSF Section offers any benefit?

Your new GPSSF Council is eager to lead the Section in its effort to fulfill its stated purpose while also working hard to convince the many eligible Minnesota attorneys who are not members that joining the Section will afford them many valuable opportunities, lessons, and relationships that will truly "enhance" their practice of law in many rewarding ways.

The GPSSF Council is making a concerted effort to ensure that Section members receive the greatest possible return on their investment of the annual Section membership dues. There are a number of ways in which the Council could approach this objective, but perhaps initially the most efficient course of action would be to implement a number of basic strategies simultaneously. The following will highlight a few of the strategies that the Council is pursuing.

First, and perhaps the most basic, is communicating with the Section members on a regular basis. The Council has made it a priority to ensure at least four newsletters are distributed in electronic format in a twelve-month period. This is the first GPSSF E-Newsletter since the 2008/2009 Council was installed, and—keeping in mind that we all have our own law practices to attend to—we will make every effort to prepare a new E-Newsletter every three months. Please help us by emailing us with any ideas or suggestions for content in the next E-Newsletter so we can provide the most relevant and up-to-date information that falls within the Section's stated purpose.

Another basic strategy is to provide educational opportunities that are relevant to the small firm and solo practitioner. If you have an idea for a two or three-hour seminar-style educational opportunity that would benefit the Section members and falls within the Section's stated purpose, please email your idea to any member of the Council. In November the Section was able to offer a CLE opportunity without any additional fee assessed to Section members who attended. On December 9th, 2008, another CLE is being offered; however this time Section members will be required to contribute \$5 to defray the expenses associated with the CLE. When submitting a suggestion or idea for an educational event, please bear in mind that frequently the individuals who are willing and able to speak on a subject relevant and informative to the Section members will expect to be compensated.

The final strategy I will discuss involves an activity that at first may be viewed negatively by many. This activity is essentially lobbying. The MSBA is very actively involved in the legislative process and several other MSBA Sections have very organized and structured legislative committees that work tirelessly on preparing and vetting proposed legislation; I know, because I am active on the legislative committee for the largest MSBA section, the Real Property Section. From what I understand, the GPSSF Section has not actively participated in the efforts of the MSBA General Assembly's Legislative Committee. Participating in the MSBA's involvement in the legislative process is a very important device in which solo and small firm practitioners not only stay informed on the most current legal issues, but they also have the opportunity to influence the development of statutory revisions. While representing a client, have you ever experienced a situation where the statute or case law, when applied to your client's situation, led to an absurd result? Then you must share the details of the situation with the Council and the Section's legislative committee so steps can be taken to try and ensure this does not happen to someone else's client some day. An example could be something as simple as eliminating the requirement that a Certificate of Real Estate Value (CRV) be completed and submitted along with a deed in a designated transfer, which could save your practice a significant amount of clerical busywork (and if you are a solo practitioner, this could really benefit you). [Note: When a designated transfer is involved, the Minnesota Department of Revenue has no interest in tracking the information supplied in the CRV, but until the statute is revised to provide an exemption from the CRV requirement for designated transfers, the party recording the deed will be required to submit a CRV even though it serves no purpose.]

In closing, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to serve as a member of your GPSSF Section Council and I look forward to meeting many of you at future GPSSF Section events.

Treasurer's Report

By Helen M. Federline

The GPSSF Section started off the year in good shape financially; we began with \$8,678.14 in our account. Since then, we have gained \$5,005.00 in revenues, and had expenses of \$777.74, for a net gain of \$4,227.26. Our current balance as of October 31, 2008 is \$12,905.40.

Recent & Upcoming Section CLEs

When: Thursday, November 20th, 2008
Topic: Client Interview & Relation-building Skills
Speakers: Jacqueline A. Dorsey, Esq.
Law Office of Hvistendahl, Moersch & Dorsey, PA
Location: MSBA Office, 600 Nicollet Mall, Suite 380, Minneapolis
Time: 8:30 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.
Credit: 1.5 Law Office Management credits to be applied for

continued on next page...

When: Tuesday, December 9th, 2008
Topic: QuickBooks Boot Camp: Are You Ready for Year-End?
Speakers: Sara M. Lassila, CPA, Jelinek Metz McDonald, Ltd.
Michael Trittippo, Minnesota State Bar Association
Location: MSBA Office, 600 Nicollet Mall, Suite 380, Minneapolis
Time: 8:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.
Credit: 2.5 Law Office Management credits to be applied for

Have an idea for a CLE? Contact Allison L. Marshall to share your idea and the GPSSF Section Council will consider it at its next meeting.

New Telephone System Technology Saves Money

By Adam W. Heaton

Solo practitioners and small firm attorneys throughout the country are working harder than before in this shrinking economy to maximize their profits and productivity. And as expected, technology is taking on a larger role in helping them realize these goals.

As many small business owners know, office telephone system hardware, as well as the monthly fees for the underlying service, can be shockingly expensive. Many solo and small firm attorneys are turning to new phone technologies as a way to allow their smaller practices to make a big impression on clients, all while keeping their overhead low. Hosted VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) phone solutions like Packet8 Virtual Office, provided by California-based communications expert 8x8, Inc., are allowing individuals to piece together the office environment that works for them, while maintaining the kind of outward presence that traditionally only the larger, more established firms could afford to project.

How hosted PBX business telephone services work

The phone rings. You answer (or don't) depending on your workload, where you are at the moment and whether or not you have an in-house office administrator or outside service to answer the call. You might get a voicemail, or the caller may simply hang up, expecting in their moment of need to get a live person on the line. Historically, only big businesses with deep pockets could afford the advanced routing systems and call features that a Private Branch Exchange (PBX) could offer. Hosted PBX business phone services, like the Packet8 Virtual Office Solution, have evened the playing field. On a regular basis, three attorneys are working with my firm, and at times there may be others on a project basis, all of whom work remotely. The hosted PBX phone service provides extensions and an auto-attendant receptionist with music on hold allow this arrangement to be transparent to the client, who can call in and be greeted and redirected to the extension they select. If, for example, the attorney of choice must be away from their remote office, but doesn't want to miss a call, he or she can easily re-route their incoming calls to their cell phone, or an alternate number. Or, if they take their telephone with them, say to the cabin for a few days, and there is a broadband internet connection available, they can simply plug the phone into the network and all incoming calls will automatically locate the phone by the unique media access control (MAC) number within the device. Many of these phones have a built-in network switch so if you only have one internet connection port available, you can simply plug the phone in first, and then plug your computer into the phone.

Ease of use is also key. With the Packet8 Virtual Office Solution, I can add and remove lines myself whenever necessary—without any wait—and thus I am always able to take quick action if I need to expand or to cut costs. A hosted PBX phone system for a virtual office offers the flexibility and cost savings of being virtual without the immediate negative perception potential clients tend to have toward an attorney without a fancy office. The Packet8 Virtual Office lets us work the way we need to and allows us to keep overhead expenses lower and provide our clients with more of the “big firm” level of service without the “big firm” fees.

For a limited time, Packet8 is extending a special offer to GPSSF Section members. If interested, send me an email aheaton@heaotnlawyers.com and I will connect you with the correct person.

Maintaining a Healthy Practice

By Ellen M. Murphy Fritsch

It's that time of the year coming up and many of us already have expectations about family togetherness and how to spend our time and money. For some of us, the holidays bring unwelcome guests, stress, and depression. It's not surprising that in trying to plan a perfect holiday, we get caught in a dizzying array of demands that often result in stress and depression. To top that off, the current economic situation has added a great deal of strain on many. While it's hard to stop and regroup when stress is at its peak the following tips can help us increase our holiday enjoyment:

Have realistic expectations both regarding your holiday experience and your financial limitations. There is no "perfect holiday."

Say "no" to extra obligations. Prioritize and make choices that fit your time commitments. Make time for yourself and plan ahead for the extra work. Say "no" to things that are out of your budget as well. It is easier to say "no" now than to deal with the financial pressure when the bill comes.

Give yourself relaxation breaks. Take a breather when you notice you feel stressed or anxious. Take some down time to stop, take a deep breath, and exhale the tension.

Make a budget and stick to it. Don't let yourself go over what you have financially allotted for gifts, as this will increase your stress. Don't worry about what you should be sending. Consider donations to charity or family gift exchanges, as well as the gift of your time – after the holidays.

Eat and drink sensibly. Holidays are so filled with great food and drinks and not enough sleep or exercise. Overindulgence adds to your stress and guilt so consider eating a healthy snack before a party and continue to get adequate sleep and exercise.

Create new holiday traditions that build connections between friends and family. Remember, the most memorable traditions may be the simplest ones that involve spending quality time together.

Put differences aside. Stress levels are usually high during the holidays and other's feelings can easily be hurt. Try listening attentively and let others know they have been heard. Holidays may not be appropriate for making quality time to settle grievances or conflicts.

Holidays and loss. If you have experienced a loss in the past year, the holidays will be difficult. Friends and family want to be there for you but may not know how. Tell them what you need.

Reflect inwardly on the meaning and spirit of the holidays for you. With all the brightness, sounds and smells of the holidays, the deeper meaning can get lost. By taking time to reflect on this, organizing your holiday priorities comes into a better perspective and reduces stress.

Seek help. If you are persistently feeling sad or anxious, experiencing physical complaints, are irritable and not sleeping, or find yourself overindulging, especially in alcohol, beyond your comfort level, talk to your doctor, mental health professional, or call Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers for resources.

Time-Saving Tips

By Allison L. Marshall

An effort will be made to include some Time-Saving Tips in each GPSSF E-Newsletter; if you have a Time-Saving Tip you'd like to share, please email it to Allison at allison@allisonmarshalllaw.com.

Committee Volunteers Needed

Please contact Ellen M. Murphy Fritsch if you are interested in volunteering to serve on a GPSSF Section committee. The Council will discuss the need for committees at its next meeting scheduled for 8:30 a.m., January 26th, 2009, at the MSBA Office.

Resources Available for Pro Bono Work

By Brian Bell

The Minnesota State Bar Association in partnership with the Minnesota Legal Services Coalition administers the website www.ProJusticeMN.org, Minnesota's online resource for poverty-law advocates. The Website is a tool for pro bono or legal services practitioners, law students, or faculty advising low-income or disadvantaged clients. Poverty-law resources are available in four practice areas: Civil, Family, Immigration, and Real Property.

Each practice area has its own resource library containing practice aids (including forms) relevant to attorneys doing pro bono in that particular area. This online resource also hosts a calendar of poverty-law continuing legal education courses, which can also be broken down by practice area.

Attorneys looking for pro bono opportunities can search the Volunteer Opportunities Guide (the "Guide"). The Guide is a database of organizations in need of pro bono help. Potential volunteers can search for organizations by area of law, location, and hours of pro bono opportunities, as well as populations, served.

If you are interested in joining the utilizing this valuable resource, then simply point your browser to www.ProJusticeMN.org, navigate to a practice area and join. Note: only those who demonstrate a commitment to providing pro bono services will be approved for access to the valuable pages within site that are designed for the exclusive purpose of aiding them in their pro bono work. Contact Brian Bell from the MSBA with questions. He can be reached by phone at 612-278-6309 or by e-mail at bbell@mnbar.org.

Section Webpage, Contact Information, & Much More

The MSBA has created a webpage for the General Practice, Solo & Small Firm Section that is located within the MSBA's website. To visit the Section's webpage, go to <http://www.mnbar.org/sections/general-practice/index.asp>. From the Section's webpage, you will be able to find the contact information for each Section Council member, the Section's Bylaws, information regarding past and future meetings and CLEs, previous Section Newsletters, and more.