

What motivates this year's Award of Distinction winner? Access to justice

One of the winners of the Toronto Lawyers Association's 2007 Award of Distinction – “for contributing to the integrity and worth of the law and the legal profession” – is also last year's winner of the Law Society Medal, the highest honour bestowed by the Law Society of Upper Canada, for his outstanding contributions to the legal profession.

You don't win these awards for being a top-notch lawyer, though, obviously, that's part of it. The essential ingredient is dedication of time, effort and talents to serving the profession and the public — with no thought of reward. Call it volunteerism. Or “getting involved.”

To illustrate: this year's winner served as president of the Advocates' Society in 2004 - 2005, and before that he was a member of its Board of Directors and Executive Committee. He is the immediate past Honorary National Legal Counsel to the Canadian Jewish Congress.

He is a Fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers, a member of the North American Committee of the Commercial Bar Association of London,

England, and a member of the Dickson Circle. (The Dickson Circle is a group of 10 civil litigation lawyers in Toronto who have acted for the Advocacy Resource Centre for the Handicapped and other pro bono initiatives.)

He tells *The Lawyers Weekly* one of the highlights of his 30-year career was serving as president of the Advocates Society, because, through that office, “I was able to assist in some initiatives for access to justice. We put into place some regulatory changes in the courts with a view to streamlining the way cases were managed through the system.”

In fact, access to justice is one of the things that motivates him to go beyond the day-to-day life of a busy litigator.

In an Advocates' Society E-Brief in the winter of 2005, he wrote, “If someone were to ask me to summarize, in one sentence, the extensive literature on the professional responsibility of a modern advocate, I would be tempted to answer ‘To enhance access to justice — the rest is commentary.’ ... Whether our justice system and the lawyers within it are performing adequately is measured today largely by the extent to which access to justice is provided or denied.”

Asked about influences in the development of his career he replies, “There isn't any one particular lawyer, but rather a certain type of lawyer: those who were prepared to do more than just work on their own cases but contribute to the profession by participating in continuing legal education, teaching, involvement in legal organizations, working in the community — contributing in more than one way.”

As for receiving the award, he says, “I am delighted, especially since it means I am being thought of in the company of the previous winners and my co-winner this year, [Associate Chief Justice of Ontario] Dennis O'Connor.”

Previous winners of the Award of Distinction include Chief Justice Roy McMurtry, Justice Warren Winkler and former justice James Farley. Practitioners include Sheila Block, Marlys Edwardh, Austin Cooper, Martin Teplitsky and Malcolm Heins.

Congratulations Benjamin Zarnett of Goodmans LLP.

By John Jaffey



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