

# Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 159, No. 181

## Build-a-bar association

About five months ago, one of my colleagues stopped by to see if I was willing to go to lunch with a former law school classmate of his.

I never miss the opportunity to go to lunch, so my inquiry as to the purpose of the meal was perfunctory.

Interestingly, though, he said his former classmate was looking to discuss the possibility of “rebooting” interest and creating a stronger bond among Filipino-American attorneys. Both my colleague and I are Filipino, as are a few others in the firm. Indeed, one of our firm founders and namesakes, Joe Tecson, is Filipino. So it made sense that we check it out.

The idea wasn't novel; a Filipino American Bar Association in Chicago predated all of us. Many highly regarded Filipino members of the bar had banded together when there were only a few of them.

However, as time passed, a generational gap seemed to grow. Involvement in the association lulled and the distance between the older and younger attorneys grew. It was the nature of things more than anything else. The association needed a reboot — and that's what we were called on to do.

In just four months, one attorney's effort to connect within the Filipino community of lawyers had culminated in a rebirth of sorts — the Filipino American Lawyers Association of Chicago. Filipino lawyers and law students met on an informal basis over that short duration of

time with a plan to reboot the effort.

In August, FALA Chicago held its first event at the Philippine consul general's office. The night drew more than 70 lawyers, judges and law students of all ethnicities. A number of businesses — including restaurants, law firms, banks and insurance companies — generously supported the event. In addition to graciously making his offices available to us, the consul general attended the event and gave remarks to the crowd.

Aurora A. Austriaco, immediate past president of The Chicago Bar Association, rightfully received special recognition for her accomplishments and inspired the group with her words. The night ended with many introductions and many new friends. Through the hard work of many, a bar association was reborn.

FALA Chicago formed around a common nationality. Not all bar associations do. There are the big ones, such as the American Bar Association and the CBA, both excellent organizations.

But associations can form around just about any common bond: practice area, geography, age or even nonlegal interests. Some are more intimate than others. Some have smaller subgroups that can be less daunting than the larger organization in its entirety. Each of them has something to offer.

Whether the association is big, small, long-established or fledgling, you are sure to enhance several aspects of your practice by becoming involved.

### DUE DILIGENCE



**FRANCISCO E. CONNELL**

*Francisco E. Connell is a principal at Chuhak & Tecson P.C. who focuses his practice on transactional matters and litigation for commercial and banking clients. Connell advises business owners on all types of legal issues, from entity formation to real estate acquisitions to succession planning, and represents lenders in bankruptcy, creditors' rights cases and complex commercial workouts. Prior to earning his law degree, he served as a Chicago police officer for almost 10 years.*

First, many of the bar associations offer Continuing Legal Education seminars and other practical tools to help with the practice of law.

Second, the collective experience and background of other association members becomes a benefit to you.

Third, you will expand your network of contacts and any expansion can benefit the business side of practice.

In short, involvement is key. I will confess that I have belonged to bar associations, and even sections, where I had little or no involvement.

Even if you take advantage of the CLE, simply attending, taking notes and leaving with a slide show presentation does not

give you the full benefit these organizations have to offer. Indeed, it is far more important to meet the other members.

You may need help in a given area of law where a fellow member is an authority. You may meet a strategic partner or a future employer. You may meet a potential client.

The key is that you will meet people when you get involved. The more people you meet, the bigger your network will be, the better off you will be.

I admit that I initially had my doubts when I first heard about the vision for a renewed bar association. Would people be interested in joining another bar association? Are people too busy and stretched thin to become involved? I was wrong. Undoubtedly a result of the hard work of the many who believed in it, the result was nothing less than spectacular.

Even though it is an ethnic-based organization, we had attorneys from almost every race attend and join. I ran into some old faces and met some new ones. I already have two follow-up lunches scheduled with attorneys I met that night. I'm working with another attorney on a possible referral to his area of law. While it was not easy making the time to get involved, it has been well worth it.

Join one you're interested in or build one to suit your needs. In either case, a bar association is a great complement to your practice.

If you're interested in joining FALA Chicago, contact me at fconnell@chuhak.com.