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A portrait of Michael Connelly, a middle-aged man with light hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a red patterned tie. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a dark wooden bookshelf filled with books.

Michael Connelly

2003-2004 President  
Houston Bar Association



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By **MICHAEL CONNELLY**

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# Why Should I Be a Member of the HBA?

**T**he idea of writing a president's page is a daunting task. First of all, I have not yet fully realized the full scope of my responsibility in serving as your president. Second, it is hard to anticipate who actually will read this page, other than my wife and me. Third, what possible information and insights would I have that have not already been experienced by the large and diverse membership of this organization?

However, rarely am I at a loss to give others advice and counsel. When I have questions about how to proceed, I tend to rely on the customary practices I have developed and those personal characteristics in which I have confidence. If you asked my family what those were, they would confirm as competent witnesses that I am always prepared to give others advice and counsel. In fact, one of my favorite statements is: "I have so much advice to give, and so little time."

I am not so bold as to lecture my colleagues in the HBA or preach a sermon about the evils of non-involvement. I do believe that membership in the HBA is essential to each of us fulfilling the calling on our lives as lawyers. It may

sound like preaching, but I intend my comments and observations to be inspiring for our members and other readers, like the practice of law has been to me.

The question "Why should I be a member of the HBA?" is not an unusual or inappropriate question. The HBA may be a big part of our lives currently, but it wasn't always that way for many lawyers in this community. When I think back on my years in the Houston Bar Association, I can recall other lawyers asking that very question. Admittedly, this was years ago, when some lawyers were more isolated in their own professional world without the realization that we are contributing daily to a grand social scheme. Currently, the "benefit" of being a member of the HBA is being realized by thousands of lawyers. Many of you may have had a chance to ponder a response to this question. Not surprisingly, I have some advice.

First, we should all be aware that about



two-thirds of the lawyers in Harris County have decided that they should be members of the HBA. This is a remarkable percentage when you consider that

the HBA is voluntary – not mandatory, like the State Bar of Texas. It is even more remarkable when you consider that there are about 32 other local area bar associations that effectively serve their members in a variety of ways. It is not just the size of the HBA – about 11,250 members and the fifth largest metropolitan bar association in the country – which contributes to that success. It is the quality of the HBA, and it is the dedication of the HBA to serving our members, our community, and our profession.

Second, being a member of the HBA has become a measure of a lawyer's and a law firm/law department's commitment to our profession and our community. The "100 Club" in which law firms and law departments have 100 percent of their lawyers as members of the HBA is the standard for commitment. To date, 149 law firms and law departments, and the faculty of all three local law schools, belong to the "100 Club." Most organizations want this community to know they are committed to the principles and the programs of the HBA.

Third, the benefit also comes from the fact that the HBA provides a real service to its members, to the community and to the profession as a whole. The HBA continues as a major provider of CLE to lawyers in this community. In 2002–2003, the HBA presented 112 hours of free seminars for HBA members, 34.25 hours of Institutes, 8.5 hours of Bench/Bar Conferences, and 208 Section CLE hours. Persons using the online CLE services recorded over 1,400 hours total. This attention to the education of our membership is, and should be, the hallmark of our profession.

Fourth, there are 37 committees of the HBA. Many of the committees address

significant community service projects. Last year, our members reported over 37,000 hours of volunteer time spent on those projects; and, as we all know, those hours are significantly underreported. The point is that well over 37,000 person hours were directed at worthwhile projects in this community because of the leadership and direction of the HBA.

Fifth, there are 25 substantive law sections of the HBA. It will be difficult to identify an area of practice that is not addressed by one of our substantive law sections. We are continually interested in identifying any practice area that justifies creation of a section. These sections are focused on the issues that are central to each practice area as a way of maintaining the relevance of that practice and the competence of the bar.

Sixth, the HBA is also a primary means by which lawyers become known by their peers. As we all know, familiarity improves working relationships, and civility in working relationships is one of the distinguishing characteristics of lawyers. We should use these opportunities to expand our knowledge of and respect for all members of the Bar.

Seventh, the HBA benefits all members of the legal profession by elevating our stature as involved and concerned citizens of this community. At a time when lawyer bashing is still popular, we all need to support the organizations that do so much to dispel those common misperceptions.

In short, very few people consider the question "Why do I need to be a member of the HBA?" even relevant anymore. The reasons are obvious and tangible. If you want to be a better lawyer, if you want to be a better member of society, and if you want to be a consummate professional, you need to be a member of the HBA.

Nice going HBA members. You make us all proud. 