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## Nassau Bar President Wants to Reach New Lawyers

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By **Susan DeSantis** | June 01, 2018 at 12:05 PM



Karabatos. Courtesy photo

Elena Karabatos is a partner in the matrimonial practice of Schlissel Ostrow Karabatos. She is the immediate past president of the New York Chapter of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers. She received her B.A. from Tufts University and her J.D. from Brooklyn Law School. She starts today as the new president of the Nassau County Bar Association.

### **What has prepared you for the position?**

I have been an active member of the Nassau County Bar Association for more than 20 years. I served in several key leadership positions in NCBA's committees and task forces. I was the chair of the Matrimonial Law Committee from 2009-2011, for which I was elected by my peers for the Directors Award for outstanding service. I was the co-chair of the Appellate Practice Committee, chair of the Child Custody Sub-Committee of the Matrimonial Law Committee, a member of the Judiciary Committee, and I represented NCBA as a delegate to the New York State Bar Association House of Delegates. This year, I helped create an LGBTQ committee at the NCBA. In addition, I have served on NCBA's Board of Directors for the past six years. My prior leadership positions with NCBA, as well as my experience as the immediate Past President of the New York Chapter of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, have given me many opportunities to work collaboratively with many people toward common goals and to address the needs of others.

I know from experience the important role that NCBA plays in the lives of Nassau County lawyers and the positive contributions our members provide to the broader community. I am grateful for the opportunities NCBA has given me to step up and be of assistance.

### **With law firms cutting expenses, how will you demonstrate that membership in the NCBA is essential? How will you get members who are not active to take advantage of their membership?**

In today's digital society where it feels like most human interaction occurs online, NCBA is unique in that it is one of a handful of bar associations in the country that has its own building with dining and catering capabilities. Attorneys can easily come to NCBA to meet in person and exchange ideas, perspectives and friendship. We believe that the value of real face-to-face interactions is more important than ever before, and we continuously develop programs and events that emphasize this exceptional value.

Beginning July 1, all NCBA members will receive free unlimited Continuing Legal Education credits for all programs held at our headquarters building in Mineola. This also includes CLE seminars presented during our Committee meetings as well as during our Bridge-the-Gap weekend. Plus, members can receive 12 free CLE credits through CD/DVD rentals of our recorded live seminars.

We have an outstanding lineup of CLE programs that are current and relevant to anyone who practices law in Nassau County. What better way to receive your CLE than from the attorneys and judges you work with on a daily basis.

### **What efforts will you make to increase membership, particularly among diverse lawyers, lawyers with unpopular political views and those employed by midsize and smaller firms?**

Diversity and inclusion have been key initiatives at NCBA over the past year. Last fall, leaders of more than a dozen specialty bars joined NCBA's leadership to get to know each other and to discuss ways the bars could work together to benefit the legal profession. We then launched a new Diversity and Inclusion Committee in February. Within 3 months, this enthusiastic group presented a highly attended re-enactment of the Meredith v. Fair trial of 1962, when African American James Meredith sued to be admitted to the all-white University of Mississippi. Our outstanding Chair Hon. Linda Mejias and Vice Chair Hon. Maxine Broderick will continue to expand diversity and inclusion activities, working with specialty bar associations. This year we also initiated a new LGBTQ Committee. This Committee has already presented CLE seminars, and is planning more activities for the fall as well as outreach to the LGBTQ community.

We have positioned NCBA as a business partner for our members, especially for smaller firms and solo practitioners. We emphasize interactive networking during our CLE seminars to help our members connect, develop new business and obtain additional referrals. We will also have more CLE programs on how to run a law firm business, and create additional opportunities for connections at NCBA.

**What is your plan for attracting lawyers in specialized fields to the association?**

NCBA has 44 committees, each focusing on a separate area of legal practice, and last year we produced more than 100 continuing legal education programs and events in all areas of practice. We continue to create committees and task forces to meet the needs of attorneys in their practice areas, including mental health law and animal law. As we value inclusion and diversity, we welcome attorneys in any and every specialized field to come join NCBA and use it as a tool to reach out to other lawyers with similar or complimentary practices.

**What will be your priorities as NCBA President? Name ways in which you want to take the NCBA in new directions.**

One of the purposes of NCBA is to promote access to justice. My priority for the upcoming year is community outreach and inclusion to address the legal needs and concerns currently facing Nassau County residents. I want to reach out to our local community to help as many people in need as possible and to encourage members of the community, especially those who may have been underserved in the past, to use and rely on NCBA when they have legal problems. At the same time, I hope to make NCBA activities and service interesting and relevant to all of our members, and to encourage active participation, especially among new lawyers and law students.

**In order to make room for the new priorities, it's often necessary to decide what an organization no longer wants to do. What committees, task forces or events should the NCBA disband?**

We are not afraid to try new events and programs. However, it is just as important that the programs that make the biggest impact on our mission continue. Thus, instead of ending programs, our members focus on how we can keep them going.

For example, when it looked like funding for our highly successful Mortgage Foreclosure Project was in jeopardy, our members jumped in to keep this important community program alive. Since 2009, we have held 185 free clinics with our members volunteering to help more than 14,000 families and children facing foreclosure or dealing with the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy. We continue to hold 2 clinics a month to address the demand for help.

**At the end of your term, how will you judge if it has been a success?**

If, at the end of my tenure, the NCBA, already a vibrant place that contributes to the local community, expands and diversifies its contributions, and serves as a professional home for the attorneys of Nassau County, I will be happy.