

PLF Directors Celebrate 30 Years at the Fund

This year, two members of the PLF’s management team are celebrating their 30th anniversary at the PLF: Bruce Schafer, Director of Claims, and Barbara Fishleder, Director of Per-



Bruce Schafer



Barbara S. Fishleder

A Guide to Protecting Your Clients’ Interests in the Event of Your Disability or Death. Over the last 17 years, its five editions have

sonal & Practice Management Assistance and Executive Director of the Oregon Attorney Assistance Program (OAAP). Their individual and collective contributions to the Oregon legal community and to the success of the Fund over the last 30 years are considerable.

Barbara Fishleder began work at the PLF as a claims attorney in 1986. In 1989, she became the director of the Fund’s loss prevention programs. As a result of her support and development, the PLF’s practice management advisor program (PMA) and personal assistance program (OAAP) are recognized nationally for their confidentiality, scope of services, and high-quality staff. Her efforts have also made the PLF’s services readily available to lawyers, law students, and judges around the state.

Under Barbara’s leadership, the PLF’s PMA program has made law practice assistance affordable and accessible, through thousands of free office visits, CLEs, practice aids, and publications. In 1999, Barbara authored the first handbook on succession planning for lawyers, *Planning Ahead*:

been reprinted or adapted by over 40 states and provinces. In addition, in 2014 she created the Oregon Lawyers’ Conference Room (OLCR), a free conference room in downtown Portland, which allows Oregon lawyers to meet their clients in a confidential space, even if they don’t have an office in the Portland area.

As executive director of the Oregon Attorney Assistance Program, Barbara expanded the services offered by the OAAP to include assistance with mental health issues, career satisfaction, and retirement, in addition to recovery support. Barbara was instrumental in establishing the Oregon statute that protects the program’s confidentiality and in creating an amendment to ORPC 8.3(c), which provides an exemption from reporting. She also built on the OAAP’s foundation of “lawyers helping lawyers,” by creating OAAP attorney counselor staff positions, so that Oregon lawyers would have the opportunity to be helped by a lawyer who is also a professionally trained counselor.

Barbara’s contribution to helping Oregon

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lawyers can also be seen through her creation of the Oregon Lawyer Assistance Foundation (OLAF). OLAF brought to fruition former OAAP attorney counselor Michael Sweeney's vision of a fund that would provide grants and loans to Oregon lawyers who are unable to pay for the mental health and addiction treatment they need.

Through the support of the PLF's CEOs and the PLF and OSB governing board members, Barbara has been able to develop crucial services that both assist Oregon lawyers and advance the mission of the PLF. Her sincere dedication, foresight, and hard work have resulted in the PLF's programs positively impacting the lives and careers of attorneys around the state.

Bruce Schafer joined the PLF Claims staff in 1986 and was appointed Director of Claims in 1991, a position he has held since. Originally from Ohio, Bruce graduated from Vassar College and Emory School of Law. During his years with the PLF, Bruce has handled or overseen the handling of more than 20,000 claims and manages a team of claims attorneys who collectively handle an average of 850 claims per year. Bruce is a frequent writer and speaker, locally and nationally, on the topics of lawyer professional liability and professionalism. In addition to his many volunteer activities, Bruce is a mediator for Small Claims Court in Multnomah County.

Over the years, Bruce has earned a reputation as a strong, confident advocate for Oregon lawyers. He combines a deep understanding of Oregon malpractice law and compassion for lawyers facing claims – all the while maintaining the highest standards of integrity and professionalism. Under his leadership, PLF claims handling is highly valued and respected by Oregon lawyers. In post-claim surveys, lawyers consistently rate their experience with Bruce and his claims team as satisfied or very satisfied in the range of 98% to 99%.

In addition to excellence in claims handling, Bruce has created a legacy within the PLF Claims Department and among the attorneys and firms that defend Oregon lawyers. Besides mentoring a seasoned group of claims attorneys at the PLF, he has also cultivated a knowledgeable and dedicated panel of outside lawyers in various claim specialty areas. His efforts have reached across generations through training initiatives designed to ensure that knowledge and experience are passed on to a younger and more diverse group of defense lawyers. When Oregon attorneys have a claim, they can be confident that they will be matched with defense counsel of the highest caliber who share in the values and mission of the PLF.

When the PLF was formed in the late 1970s, part of the vision was a structure in which local expertise in handling malpractice claims would result in fairer outcomes for Oregon lawyers and the public they serve. No longer would the specter of malpractice claims and coverage be a source of uncertainty. With a stable institution to handle claims, Oregon lawyers could focus on the practice of law. More than an insurer, the PLF would improve the quality of the practice of law in Oregon by improving standards of care through consistent and thoughtful claims handling. This proactive approach has allowed the use of creative claims handling techniques, such as claim repair, things rarely seen in the commercial insurance context. Perhaps more than anyone else, Bruce has been responsible for making this vision real. Observers from across the country and Oregon lawyers themselves now recognize the beneficial effect that the PLF has had on the legal culture in Oregon.

Oregon lawyers – and ultimately the public – have benefited because of the work of Barbara Fishleder and Bruce Schafer. Congratulations to Barbara and Bruce for their 30 years at the PLF! Thank you both for your dedicated service and for your continued invaluable contributions to the legal profession in Oregon.