

Our Members, Our Clients, Our Parents, Our Selves

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The following is adapted from Ruth Phelps' President's Address given in May during the NAELA Annual Meeting, Orlando, Fla.

Welcome to the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys.

Welcome to a place to meet fellow members from across the country and across the world, to discuss that case that weighs on your mind, that client for whom you just haven't been able to find the best answer — a time to step back and reflect on your practice, your goals, and your aspirations. Welcome to the NAELA community.

NAELA started over 20 years ago, conceived in the minds of 35 people just like us — only we now are over 4,000. The goal then was the same as it is now — to provide information and support to those like-minded individuals who caught a glimpse of what an Elder Law practice could and should be and who hopped aboard for the ride.

And what a ride it has been. Most recently, we have lived through the passage of the DRA of '05, with its sweeping changes to the Medicaid rules. We are survivors of "Granny Goes to Jail," and "Granny's Lawyer Goes to Jail," laws from the 1990s, laws under which advising about Medicaid could land you in jail, and we will survive DRA '05 as well. We are living through another historic milestone — the "nonpassage" of the estate tax reform, and are adrift in a sea of uncertainty. Are we discouraged? Well, of course we are. Are we defeated? Not by a long shot. We have trained our talents and our resources and our good thinking on this issue, and we have helped to counsel our members through these trying times as well.

Will there be other challenges? Of course there will be. No one thought we would get where we are with the estate tax rules — they have all been turned upside down for 2010, and health care reform continues to preoccupy Congress. Medicaid and Social Security face funding issues. The issue isn't whether there will be challenges — the issue is how will we face them, and overcome them.

We have come a long way. We have our own executive director and our own in-house staff. We are weaning our database and Web site from the management company we

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used for so many years and will then truly be standing "on our own two feet." We experimented with additional programming, with some home runs and some strikeouts. We are returning in 2011 to more streamlined programming, to narrow our focus and better catch your attention. We will expand our online and downloadable options, so that you can take NAELA with you "on the run."

Our goal is simple — to provide the best support we can to you, our members, our most important asset. At NAELA, whether in-person or online, you can meet our most important asset — the other members just like you. Members who aren't sure that another client will ever walk in the door. Members who aren't sure how they will pay the rent next month. Members who are so busy they do not know how they will get all the work done — who appear to have "figured it all out." You've taken the first step, the most important step, by being a part of NAELA, by making the decision to actively participate in the NAELA community. Ask your colleagues for information, for assistance, for guidance and be ready and willing to offer information, assistance, and guidance to colleagues in need. Remember, the strength of NAELA is our community. The strength of NAELA is you. ■