
RAMSEY COUNTY NEW LAWYERS “GET OUT THE VOTE” 1998

I. Project Description

The Ramsey County New Lawyers Section is an affiliate of the ABA Young Lawyers Division, the Minnesota State Bar Association, and the Minnesota State Bar Association New Lawyers Section. The affiliate is headquartered in Saint Paul, Minnesota, our capital city.

The smaller of the two metro area affiliates in our state, the RCBA New Lawyers had been declining in numbers and enthusiasm for a number of years. The RCBA New Lawyers capitalized on the “fun” atmosphere of the 1998 elections (that elected Governor Jesse Ventura!) to hold a “Get Out the Vote” rally that would attract more of the Section members to active participation. Although this activity was geared primarily to newer lawyers to attract members, it was open to the public, also, as a public outreach effort. The affiliate created a social atmosphere that demystified politics and made it more user-friendly and inviting to its members.

II. Project Planning/Development

A. Identification of Need

At the outset of this planned activity, the RCBA New Lawyers was a defunct organization. It had tried to plan a course of hour long CLEs in the 1997-1998 bar year, but they were generally attended by only three or four people.

The affiliate needed a good idea to “jump start” the Section or consider disbanding. The goal was to create a fun social/public service event that would attract new members and be a tangible benefit to the Ramsey County newer lawyer. One person, and subsequent co-chair of the project suggested a voter rally since it was an interesting election year, (in Minnesota, there were very “colorful” reform party candidates, and a very heated County Attorney’s race) and this type of forum would likely generate interest. A newer lawyer could benefit from meeting candidates and making informed voting decisions, and learning why and how to get involved in the grass roots political process.

The affiliate felt this was important as a public service project, also, because younger people (even those in their late twenties) have been traditionally apathetic and disinterested in the political process. In fact, there are future hopes of expanding this event to provide a forum for candidates’ debates akin to a League of Women Voters for “Generation X” that would focus on issues relevant to younger voters. This effort would be targeted to get *all* newer voters, traditionally underrepresented in the political process, to take part in politics.

B. Determination of Project Goals and Design

1. Decisions to be made

a. Options – Project Goals

- 1) To provide a fun and exciting social event that would revitalize our stagnant affiliate
- 2) To obtain information from Ramsey County new lawyers (through a survey at the voter rally) to plan future events
- 3) To facilitate interest among newer lawyers in the political process
- 4) To facilitate newer lawyers to sign up as volunteers for political candidates
- 5) To publicize the Section by hosting high profile candidates
- 6) To facilitate newer lawyers to meet candidates for political office in an informal setting, asking questions and becoming reasonably informed about their voting decisions
- 7) To provide voter registration information to those who did not know how/where to register
- 8) To the extent the event attracted senior lawyers or non-lawyers, to solicit opinions on developing a symbiotic relationship

b. Options – Project Design

The RCBA New Lawyers developed a unique event to accomplish all of the goals as stated above. First, the affiliate arranged to occupy a party room in a large, popular bar that was equidistant from the downtowns of the Twin Cities, to ensure a larger turnout. Next, the RCBA New Lawyers provided drink tickets and a food buffet for attendees. Attendees visited a series of information booths, starting with a booth for registration/check in (it was required to get a drink ticket), a booth staffed by a popular local judge that allowed the attendees to sign up to volunteer for political campaigns, a booth that displayed Ramsey County New Lawyers Section activities and literature, and a table where attendees could pick up general voter information and registration forms.

All political candidates in the upcoming election were invited to come and mingle with attendees. The event attracted all the candidates in the Hennepin (Minneapolis) and Ramsey (St. Paul) County attorney races, judicial candidates, and other candidates for statewide office. The event even attracted one gubernatorial candidate. The committee had confirmed that Jesse Ventura would come to the event, but he had to cancel when the date changed one day because of a conflict for the party room. Candidates passed out campaign literature and encouraged new lawyers to go to the polls. The candidates were not permitted to give speeches, but were allowed to give out door prizes at the public address platform that was set up near the Ramsey County New Lawyers display booth. That allowed the candidates some free promotion and recognition as they were introduced to the room. When candidates were introduced, their political affiliation, prospective office, and geographical jurisdiction were noted so that new lawyers could identify their local candidates.

Affiliates may want to solicit attendance from news media organizations for this type of voter rally. It can be an additional lure for attracting the candidates, and will provide free publicity for the bar association and new attorneys.

2. Decision making process

Choosing a date is critical for this event. To attract the most high profile candidates (thus potentially attracting more attendees), the planners must determine who is victorious in their local political primaries. In Minnesota, it is in the first part of September. (The National League of Women Voters' web site, listed at the end of these materials, will tell you the dates of each state's primary.) The event should occur as soon as possible after the primary, because as the campaigns run their course, it gets increasingly difficult to attract the candidates to an event, as schedules become increasingly hectic. On the other hand, however, it helps to have a couple of weeks from the primary to the event to confirm and list the candidates' names on publicity to attract more attendees. The RCBA New Lawyers agreed to handle this by updating confirmed attendees on the web site only, and sending out more generalized advertising flyers to promote the event itself. The bar staff changed the web site daily as confirmations arrived. At one point the affiliate web page boasted, "Meet the attorney general candidates for the State of Minnesota."

Another consideration for choosing the date is the voter registration requirement in a particular state. In Minnesota, a voter must register to vote by mail more than thirty days from an election, or the voter must register at the polls. Therefore, the RCBA held the rally more than thirty days from the election to provide "mail in" registration forms as a service to the attendees. Check a state's requirements to help select the best date. (Again, the National League of Women Voters' web site, listed in the end of the materials, has the information about all states.)

This project was a three-person project, as there were only three active members of the Ramsey County affiliate at that time. Those members solicited and received support from the senior bar. The committee then met several times to select a date, place, and target groups, and divided the work. One person solicited most of the candidates and took care of the publicity. Another member solicited some candidates and solicited door prizes focusing on door prizes from businesses in the Minneapolis area. The third focused on soliciting door prizes from the Saint Paul area. Typical door prizes were \$50 gift certificates to local restaurants. Thank you letters were sent by each person that solicited prizes. Additional help in soliciting candidates was provided from the Social Chair of the other metro area new lawyers section, the Hennepin County New Lawyers.

3. Considerations in Project Planning

a. Community Resources

The affiliate advertised this event through a local paper, the *Highland Villager*, and recruited local candidates to attend the forum. The committee also obtained information and literature from the League of Women Voters and the State of Minnesota (Office of the Secretary of State---Voter Registration Unit.)

The RCBA New Lawyers also sought sponsorship and assistance from the major parties via the Young Democrats and Young Republicans by sending e-mail to their web sites. The committee accessed the six major political parties in Minnesota on their web sites and notified all local party headquarters of the event to publicize it to their candidates.

b. Personnel

The three Co-Chairs of the New Lawyers Section staffed the registration booth, requiring every person to fill out an RCBA survey before being entitled to a drink ticket. In cases of those refusing to fill out a survey, a business card was required for the door prize drawing. This way, the organization had a record of ALL attendees. One committee member took charge of giving out the drink tickets when a completed survey was collected. Another member acted as emcee and would take periodic breaks from registering to get on the public address system, introduce the candidate that was giving out the current door prize, and encourage newer lawyers to go to the polls.

The affiliate used available display resources from the Bar Associations to set up attractive and inviting booths from the Minnesota and Ramsey Bar Associations. We also listed Hennepin County (Minneapolis) New Lawyers as a co-sponsor. Set up time was very minimal.

After the event, bar association staff was utilized to tabulate and record the results of the surveys. Bar Association staff also photographed our event for inclusion in our monthly bar magazine, *Minnesota Bench and Bar*.

c. Revenue Availability/Fund raising

The affiliate applied for and received an increase in the budget for this event. The RCBA New Lawyers was granted \$900 by the senior bar, and spent \$843 on this project for food and drinks. This subsidized the entire cost of a particularly elaborate food buffet, as the committee felt this was a last ditch effort to attract and recruit newer members. A smaller affiliate could solicit donations of appetizers, and opt not to provide alcoholic drinks, which would substantially reduce the cost. We also received a grant from a larger affiliate, the Minnesota State Bar Association New Lawyers, of \$1000 for mailings/postage only. A smaller affiliate could rely on the relatively inexpensive means of e-mailing flyers, using broadcast faxes, and encouraging fellow members to post flyers in the workplace.

The affiliate also received donations of approximately 20 gift certificates for door prizes and legal education related materials.

d. Other (equipment/physical needs)

The affiliate negotiated for a rather large party room in one of St. Paul's more popular bars, and arranged for several six-foot tables to serve as the various booths referenced above. The registration booth should be particularly long so that it can accommodate many people standing in line to fill out surveys. The microphone was near the Ramsey County Bar Association booth, so that participants could hear the candidates as they were introduced and hear their own name if it was called for a door prize. This should be a requirement, as the room will get very noisy.

One Co-Chair came early to hang the Section banner in the room to clearly demarcate the event and also set up baskets to collect surveys and a fish bowl to collect business cards for prize drawings. Survey sheets and pens advertising the RCBA were also set out. Each booth was labeled as "Voter Registration Station," "Sign up here to work on a political campaign," "Sign in," etc.. Nametags were provided to all attendees so that the newer lawyers could get to know their peers. The candidates were required to wear different colored nametags so that new lawyers could identify them as political candidates.

As a thank you to the sponsors, their names were placed on a large poster and attendees were asked to patronize them for their sponsorship.

III. Implementation—How to replicate the Project

A. Timetable

Three to Six Months Out:

Choose the date and location of the event. Be sure to personally inspect the room so that it is large enough to display all booths and have a “staging area” where candidates can be introduced to the crowd. Negotiate for a private, “blocked off” area with a sign, and get the facility to confirm any special deals or extra charges in writing. (Most venues will likely have a written, standard contract.) A controlled entrance will help to get a survey from all those who attend if they must wait in line to get in the door. Be sure to check out the facility’s audiovisual ability and ask to see and test the microphone in the staging area.

Assign a committee and hold a meeting to divide up tasks. Create the survey(s) that the attendees will be asked to fill out. It would be prudent to run the surveys past the senior bar to see what kind of information they might also want to solicit and to get those bar leaders “on board” with the project. The surveys should generally not be more than a page and should have multiple “check off” options so that people will fill them out. If the surveys are too onerous, most attendees will not be likely to comply, or will give incomplete or inadequate information.

Two Months Out:

Prepare an advance flyer for the event. Distribute this “Save the Date” flyer to CLE courses and through the network of law firm contacts and others. Examples of other people who might post your flyers are local law libraries and courthouses. Do a second “mock up” of the flyer with empty space to list the candidates’ names in it. Collect for distribution: voter registration forms and literature from the state, county, and the League of Women Voters. Try to obtain actual registration forms and “fast fact” sheets describing voter procedures in your state. Research the voting requirements for the state. Recruit a person to staff the voter information booth and answer questions. The League of Women Voters may choose to assist. Be sure to call and ask these organizations if you can freely distribute and copy their literature. Ask the organizations if they have any advice that they can give the affiliate about what else to stock.

Primary Election Day:

Record the state and local winners of the primaries and contact their schedulers immediately with the date of the voter rally event. Also send a fax to all party headquarters reminding them of this opportunity for their candidates. Since the major candidates are now set, add their names to the “mock up” flyer that has been previously prepared and fax/distribute it immediately for posting with law firm and other contacts. Also, if available, this would be the time to update the affiliate web site with candidates’ names as they confirm that they will be in attendance.

Prepare a press release to encourage the news organizations to attend and cover the event. Send and fax it if possible. To interest the media, it may help to call them personally or write a personal note. Remind them there is free food and drinks. At the very least, alert the people who staff the local bar publication, if there is one. They should be on hand to take pictures of the successful event.

One Day Prior to Event:

Gather blank nametags for attendees and candidates. Find cardboard posters, pens, markers, and all other materials needed to make signs to mark the booths. Assign someone to print and copy survey forms, and separate them into boxes for junior attorneys, senior attorneys, and non-attorney guests. This avoids fumbling for the proper form. Locate baskets that can be used to collect business cards of attendees for prize drawings. Bring blank business cards for attendees that do not have business cards. Ask them to write their name and address on the blank card to be eligible for the door prizes.

Collect clipboards and legal pads. Write each candidate’s name on the top with a note that new lawyers can sign up to work on their campaign, particularly to distribute literature.

Post Event Concerns:

Immediately after the event, assign a person to collect the surveys. That person should immediately copy and distribute all the attorney surveys to all the local affiliate sponsors. Ask bar staff to tabulate these surveys and cross check the information on the form to see if the respondent attorneys have an active bar membership. Print out a list of attendees, marking their last active dates in the bar association. A team should be assigned to follow up with those attorneys that have let their membership lapse.

The results themselves should be tabulated within a few weeks of the event. Provide copies of these results to the senior bar and any long range planning committees for their use. After the results are tabulated, the leaders of the New Lawyers Section should meet and plan future events utilizing the information in the surveys.

The non-attorney guest surveys should be distributed to the attorney referral staff if they have indicated a need for more information about the Bar, or would be interested in a lawyer referral or legal representation.

A smaller affiliate with no bar staff and no attorney referral program will have to assign the task of tabulating the results to one of the committee members.

B. Recruitment and Training of Volunteers/Personnel

The 1998 "Get Out the Vote" rally was organized with three people. As stated, the affiliate sought the help of several co-sponsors, and subsequently received help from the Social Chair of the Hennepin County affiliate. New lawyers recruited the Executive Committee(s) of the Senior Bar(s) and partners in committee members' law offices to attend and mingle with the junior bar. Staff personnel from the various bar organizations were encouraged to attend to take photographs and answer questions.

One highlight for the event was a popular local judge who was recruited to encourage new lawyers in the political process. That judge committed to staffing a booth with blank clipboards, and encouraged the newer lawyers to volunteer for the various political campaigns. He himself was party neutral, and did not favor particular candidates or agendas. He took all completed lists and distributed them to the respective candidates. The judge's "sign up and volunteer" booth was set in a quieter area of the room under a very large sign so that he could mix with attendees and offer them advice on how to become involved in political organizations. The sign touted, "Meet Judge Perez and find out how YOU can become interested in politics!"

C. Publicity

The RCBA New Lawyers distributed flyers, made posters, and sent newsletter submissions to various local periodicals and the local and state bar magazines. The affiliate also did a direct mailing of 1000 flyers to new lawyers in the database. Affiliates should also explore free advertising in legal periodicals and community newspapers.

The event was listed on the Section web site with rotating text so that it would stand out. The MSBA New Lawyers listserv (an e-mail message service that new lawyers can subscribe to) was not up and running at that time, but would have been a great publicity resource as well.

Two smaller affiliates in Minnesota have had much success with broadcast faxes. There is no cost to this advertising method. (Warning: try to set the fax so that it transmits late at night so it does not interfere with a firm's normal business.)

Flyers were also distributed at continuing legal education seminars and law schools.

Finally, the RCBA New Lawyers have tried to make contacts with a new lawyer in each major firm and government office. That lawyer is asked to distribute the pre-printed flyers by putting them on a bulletin board in their office. Flyers are e-mailed to save postage costs.

D. Day-To-Day Operations

On the day of the event, one person should arrive very early to go over setup with the facility's wait staff, and set up the booths, literature and signs. Each candidate should be prepared to arrive early if they want to distribute any of their own literature throughout the room. The well-organized candidates had

representatives that did this for them. After the event is over, one person should coordinate tabulation of the survey results and one person should be assigned the task of sending thank you notes to sponsors, volunteers, and special guests.

IV. **Evaluation and Impact**

The RCBA New Lawyers Section was thoroughly surprised to get about 100 new lawyer attendees and received rave reviews from participants. The statistics showed that most attendees were non-members of the association, and many had never attended a bar event. The affiliate was able to interest many of these members to join the bar.

From this group, the affiliate had an organizational meeting two months later, and held the first elections for RCBA New Lawyer officers in recent history. Today, Ramsey County Bar Association New Lawyers is an active affiliate and has met regularly every month since the inception of this event.

The bar surveys that were tallied were put to use in long range planning considerations for the Minnesota and Ramsey Bar Associations.

Some attendees used the official forms to register to vote that night. Some people also signed up to volunteer for a political candidate to begin to get involved in the political process. Judge Perez reported that many people told him that they always wanted to get involved in politics and didn't know how until the event. Feedback indicated that the event made politics "fun" and "accessible."

All the people at the function had the opportunity to meet and question over twenty candidates in an informal setting. Most importantly, however, the attendees were perhaps in a better position to make an informed voting choice.

In the future, the event could be expanded to include a lengthier forum, including debates between candidates. This could occur in a larger area with multiple rooms featuring candidates of the same race answering questions and debating in a particular room. The social area could occur in a foyer area near the rooms where the debates are being held.

This event certainly met its main goal, which was to increase interest in the affiliate. With modifications as suggested in the preceding paragraph, it could be expanded to offer a greater community service as well.

V. **Bibliography/Other Resources**

Primary Affiliate Contact:

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<http://www.ramseybar.org/>

Co-Sponsor Contacts:

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<http://www2.mnbar.org/sec/newlawyers/index.htm>

Attn: Gina Lombardo, 1998-1999 Social Chair
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<http://www.hcba.org/index.htm>

Other Resource:

The League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS)
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<http://www.lwv.org/>