

Strategy

Love of the law can be uniting force

On the Hot Seat

Mark D. Mason

President, Massachusetts Bar Association

Mark D. Mason, a partner at nine-lawyer Cooley Shrair in Springfield, began a one-year term as president of the Massachusetts Bar Association last month. A specialist in commercial litigation, domestic law, mediation, and gay and lesbian legal affairs, he spoke with Globe reporter Sacha Pfeiffer.

Q. *The Boston Bar Association tends to be dominated by lawyers from big downtown firms. What's a typical Mass. Bar member, if there is such a thing?*

A. A typical Mass. Bar member practices law in a small or solo practice, is oftentimes a general practitioner, and typically maintains his or her practice outside of Boston, although we certainly have a very large population of members who are attorneys in large firms.

Q. *You are the Mass. Bar's first openly gay president. To what extent will that define your presidency?*

A. I'm very proud to be the Mass. Bar's first openly gay president, and I'm extremely proud to be president of the Mass. Bar. But while my sexual orientation may give me a certain appreciation for the diversity of the bar, it really has little bearing on my vision for the Mass. Bar as well as my day-to-day dealings with it.

Q. *What are your thoughts on the future of same-sex marriage?*

A. We are very proud at the Mass. Bar to have supported marriage equality at every step. We will do everything in our power to ensure equality of marriage, and



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we believe that marriage equality is here to stay.

Across the nation, however, the experience has been obviously quite different, and while we may not see equality in marriage currently or in the near future in the majority of states, I sincerely believe that a generational shift will result in marriage equality across the country.

Q. *Most incoming bar presidents pick a theme for their presidencies. What's yours?*

A. My theme — or, as I prefer to

call it, philosophical goal — is that we are united in the law. By that I mean that the law is the common thread that is woven through the fabric of our lives. As Americans, we all hold in common that the law constitutes the pillars that support the weight of our society.

Q. *You've spent most of your career at small firms in Western Massachusetts. Have you deliberately chosen not to work for a large firm?*

A. While I was in college I worked at some of the largest

firms in Manhattan and enjoyed the experience, but I prefer the lifestyle I have in Western Massachusetts, which I might not have in a larger metropolitan area. As individuals, it's important for us to maintain a balance between our professional and personal lives, and I have many interests outside of my professional work.

I enjoy the countryside, I play in the first violin section for the Pioneer Valley Symphony, and I like driving five minutes from my home to the office and then sharing my time between our home in the city and our lakeside home 20 minutes away in the foothills of the Berkshires. If I were at a large firm, I don't think I'd have the time to fully enjoy all those additional activities.

Q. *I understand you spend some of your free time renovating an old house?*

A. My husband and I — we just got married — have a 24-room Victorian home in Springfield that we bought four years ago. It's like painting the Golden Gate Bridge: It's a work in process. But we see ourselves as custodians of the home while we have the privilege of living there with our three dogs and two parrots. We enjoy its architectural and artistic beauty and are extremely thankful that we live in a city where we can afford such a home.

Q. *Do you like practicing law?*

A. I love it. First and foremost, it gives lawyers the opportunity to help the public, and as lawyers that's generally what has drawn us to the law and compels us forward in our day-to-day profession. There's nothing more rewarding than utilizing our skills and experience to resolve disputes and to assist the public through what is oftentimes the most difficult period of their lives.