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VOLUME 1 ISSUE 1 CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE SERVING SOUTHEAST TENNESSEE AND NORTH GEORGIA DECEMBER 2007

What was happening in Chattanooga in 1957

Saturday, December 18

The Combustion Engineering, Inc., has added more than 1,000 persons to its work force here during 1957, and is a bright spot in the present shadow of unemployment and business set backs throughout the nation. Combustion's total employment in its Chattanooga division now exceeds 5,000.

Sunday, December 19

The state highway department Sunday called for bids January 17 on 2.8 miles of new highway through the east Chattanooga industrial area, to connect with Riverside Drive.

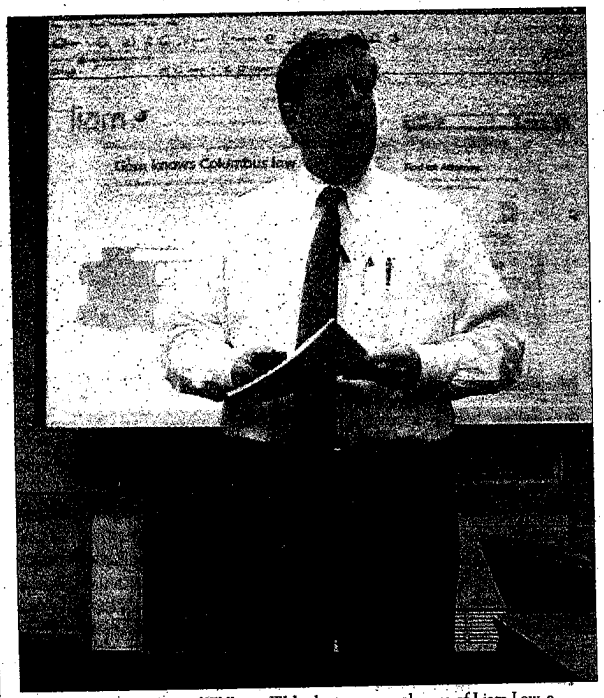
Monday, December 20

The Tennessee Building commission is proceeding with plans for the new state mental hospital

Chattanooga Bar Association plans online Referral Service

By David Laprad

The Chattanooga Bar Association (CBA) is preparing to launch a new service that will provide the local community with easily accessible lawyer and legal information. Called CLIPS (Chattanooga Lawyers Information Provider Service), this service will connect those in need of legal assistance with the attorneys who provide it. Lawyer participation is the key to making it happen.



Greg Pearson, president of Williams Web, demonstrates the use of Liam Law, a Columbus, Ohio-based website similar to a service the Chattanooga Bar Association will launch in 2008. Called CLIPS, it will connect Chattanooga-area residents who need legal help with the attorneys who can provide it. *(David Laprad)*

At a seminar in Chattanooga earlier this month introducing the proposed service to area lawyers, Steve Jacoway, past chairman of the lawyer referral service (LRS) committee of the CBA, told those attending, "After extensive analysis of our current LRS program, our executive director has come up with an exciting way to revamp our referral service. It will utilize the Internet, which is how a lot of outreach is done today."

"...the Association to ensure that the development of the website format and content are compliant with the disciplinary rules on advertising and specialization."

— Nancy Jones, chief disciplinary counsel of the Board of Professional Responsibility

The CBA is utilizing the services of Williams Web, a Chattanooga-based Web site design firm, to build the site. During the seminar, Greg Pearson, president of Williams Web, demonstrated the use of Liam Law (liamlaw.com), a Columbus, Ohio-based Web site similar to what the CBA hopes to put into service.

As Pearson explained, lawyers who sign up for CLIPS will be able to identify one or more areas of law in which they specialize. They will also be given a Web page on which they can place their picture, contact details (email address and telephone numbers), qualifications (degrees, accomplishments, bar memberships, court admissions and community involvement), a brief history of their career (states in which they are licensed, dates they were admitted to the Bar and significant cases they have handled), fees and other information geared toward helping potential clients make an informed choice.

Visitors to CLIPS will select the area of law in which they need help — whether it's immigration, malpractice or another field — and then choose an attorney from a list of matches. The order of the names will be randomized each time a visitor loads a particular category, giving every member an opportunity to be listed at the top.

Lynda Hood, executive director of the CBA, told the group the association began brainstorming

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CLIPS

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after seeing a dramatic drop in the use of the organization's long-standing LRS. Only about 20 member lawyers out of 893 CBA members participated in LRS for 2007, and fewer clients were using the Service as well. In June 2007, the CBA's Board of Governors voted to suspend the LRS as of October 31, 2007, and begin work on an improved service for the Chattanooga community.

CLIPS will offer lawyers and clients benefits above and beyond online accessibility. For attorneys, the process will be less expensive, as CLIPS will eliminate the all the fees associated with LRS. Instead, lawyers will pay an annual fee of $300, saving money and completely eliminating the paperwork associated with LRS. Additionally, clients will appreciate not having to pay the referral fee to the CBA. CLIPS will also educate visitors on legal matters and help them understand what to expect from an attorney in a given situation. "It will not, however, be a source of legal advice," said Hood. "CLIPS will exist to connect consumers and small business people with local attorneys in a straightforward manner.

"To inform the public about this new service, we will have to do a lot of advertising. We will advertise on various community websites, morning and afternoon drive-time radio and television talk shows, etc. After looking at the numbers and demographics for the websites of three Chattanooga area television stations (Channels 3, 9 and 12), the CBA determined online advertising would be one of many effective ways to reach potential clients," said Hood. "In my research, www.NewsChannel9.com gets an average of 800,000 page views per month. Of those 800,000 views, 94 percent are from the Chattanooga DMA. In 2006, the number of Internet households reached an estimated 75 million, which is 65 percent of total U.S. households. Seventy-one percent of total adults use the Internet."

Another important factor in notifying the public about CLIPS will be search engine optimization. Pearson said his firm will format the information on the Web site in such a way that the service will appear in online searches for "Chattanooga lawyers" or other similar queries. (The website address that will be used for CLIPS will be www.chattanoogalaw.org. This domain has already been purchased for 10 years.) In addition, lawyers will be given instructions for optimizing the data on their personal CLIPS page for search engines.

To make CLIPS a reality, Hood said the association needs 100 of its members to sign up for the service. Although the CBA plans to subsidize the cost of operating CLIPS, it will never launch without the involvement of local attorneys. For that reason, Hood encouraged everyone to talk about the service with other lawyers and let her know if they intend to sign up.

"Three hundred dollars is nothing compared to the benefits you'll get in terms of exposure," she said. The CBA wants to have CLIPS up and running by spring, so getting sufficient positive feedback now is essential to moving forward.

To be considered for CLIPS, a lawyer must be a member of the CBA, must be in good standing with the Board of Professional Responsibility of Tennessee and must be carrying at least $100,000 in professional liability insurance, among other criteria.

Nancy Jones, chief disciplinary counsel of the Board of Professional Responsibility, said, "The CBA has embarked on an exciting new concept of using the Web to help match consumers in need of legal services with members of the association who possess the needed knowledge and skills. The association is exempt from the requirements of Supreme Court Rule 44, regulating Lawyer Intermediary Organizations, and the Board of Professional Responsibility will work closely with the Association to ensure that the development of the website format and content are compliant with the disciplinary rules on advertising and specialization."

"We are excited about this endeavor and through CLIPS, the goal is to continue to offer a service to the community and a service to our members," Hood said.

For questions or to express your support, call Lynda Hood at 423-756-3222 or email at lhood@chattbar.org. ❖