



## Law Student Perspective

by Ashley Akers

# Why Joining Organizations—Like the FBA—Is Better Than Meeting Elvis

### Law school is not only about learning the law, just

like law practice is not only about sitting at a desk billing all day (or so I hope). Law school is about understanding how to read case law, learning how to resolve issues, and most important, joining every club, organization, and association to make your resume stand out as best as possible. This is essential, because you know that is what the other hundreds of law students applying for the same firm jobs and clerkships are doing.

But which of these clubs, organizations, and associations are a worthwhile endeavor in which to invest precious time, limited energy, and significant effort? On the short list is the Federal Bar Association. Though I am certain all presidents say the same of their own organization, my opinion was recently validated by a man with many more years of experience and infinite more wisdom: Gen. William K. Suter.

Gen. Suter's practice as an attorney has been nothing short of outstanding. During his 29 years of service in the U.S. Army, he rose to the highest ranks, serving as the major general. Then he served as the U.S. Supreme Court Clerk for 22 years. Now, he is a visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution and a regular speaker at graduations, annual conferences, and other law-and Army-related events across the nation.

The KU Law FBA Student Division hosted Gen. Suter for a two-day stay in Jayhawk Land to meet with and speak to division members. While it was no coincidence that his visit coincided with a KU men's basketball game (he attended Trinity University on a basketball scholarship), the trip was inspired by his willingness to pay forward all the benefits he has received from the Federal Bar Association.

Gen. Suter did not find the FBA so much as the FBA found him. His 51-year membership began when he was a judge advocate general in Anchorage. A committed FBA member had moved to Alaska and chosen to start the first chapter in the state. Suter's superior at the time called him one day and said, "Bill, an FBA chapter is starting,

and it's probably a good idea for you to join." Understanding that he had no real choice in the matter, Suter joined the Alaskan Chapter in 1964. The small group of members met for a monthly luncheon at the Wigwam Cafe in Anchorage for a "mostly social gathering." It was only a short year later that Suter would first reap the benefits of his commitment to the FBA.

While still serving in Alaska, Suter was tasked with setting up a federal magistrate's court on Fort Richardson. Unsure of how or where to begin, he called his fellow Alaskan FBA members to ask for help. "Of course I didn't know how to set up a court; no one teaches students that in law school," Gen. Suter said. "But I did know a group of people from the Wigwam Cafe who could help me." And while the Wigwam Cafe group was Gen. Suter's earliest memories of his participation in the FBA, it was only the first of many lifelong relationships established in part by his membership.

During his visit at KU Law, Gen. Suter spoke to both the prestige of the FBA and the unending support from the federal judiciary, while also noting how important the organization is for students. "Federal judges across the country and the Supreme Court justices are members of the FBA, and students can be members of that same organization. It's important that law students become involved in this network of lawyers to meet people and learn about the federal practice," he said.

Gen. Suter attributes some of his greatest professional and personal relationships to the FBA, and he believes every law student should take advantage of the opportunity to become a member in the early stages of learning to practice law. "For most law students, the FBA is the first professional organization where they can become a member. It's important for students to make the decision to get involved early in a professional organization where they can meet other students, successful lawyers, and members of the judiciary," Gen. Suter said.

While speaking with KU Law Division members, Gen. Suter shared stories of his experiences speaking at FBA chapters across

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*Ashley Akers is a second-year law student at the University of Kansas School of Law. A founding member of the Federal Bar Association Division at KU Law, Ashley is now the active president. Photo used with permission from University of Kansas School of Law.*

the country, working for the Supreme Court, and enjoying a seat at the State of the Union address. He attributes many of his experiences to the connections he made and opportunities he was given through the FBA as a young lawyer. He said, "Networking is important, and getting out to meet people is the best thing you can do, especially when you are young. Networking is how opportunities are created." Certainly one of the greatest benefits of being a FBA member is access to the online membership directory and open invitations to large networking events. For law school divisions, members enjoy the benefits of being part of a group of peers who value these same opportunities.

Gen. Suter's appreciation for the opportunities provided through his membership with FBA may be most noticeable when he talks about Elvis Presley. Over a two-day visit and more than

a few conversations with the General, I heard about his personal relationship with the King only once—and in less than three sentences. Gen. Suter noted his time with the celebrity when they were in boot camp together, complimented the icon's humble and gracious attitude, and then returned to his praise of the FBA. If that does not speak to the greatness of this organization, I do not know what does.

For law students, becoming a part of an FBA division is more than just joining another something to bolster a resume. It's the beginning of a lifelong journey as a member of a professional organization that includes the most highly regarded attorneys, judges, and practitioners in the country. A telling example is the wonderful opportunity our division had to meet Gen. Suter and learn about his incredible career as a Federal Bar Association member. ☺

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stock and our consumption of their products, do great harm to the environment in many ways. There is general agreement that the main cause of global warming is livestock production, with some estimates (from the World Bank) running as high as more than 50 percent. A United Nations agency has a lower estimate, but it is still higher than the estimate for the transportation sector. (Think of the recent California drought problem.) The rearing of livestock also consumes natural resources at rates as high as five to 10 times the amount needed to produce an equivalent amount of human food from plant sources. Other consequences of this practice include dangerous depletion of deep-water (aquifers) sources, loss of topsoil, and contamination of local water resources. All of these activities result in poorer human health, exceptional health care costs that cannot be maintained, and serious abuse of animals.

**FBA:** The tobacco industry was sued based on its adverse health impacts and settled lawsuits with most of the states for hundreds of billions of dollars. Do you foresee the food industry coming under similar scrutiny or legal pressure related to foods or additives that might be linked to poor health?

**Campbell:** It is highly unlikely that it will be the food additives that cause the future health problems and their attendant costs. It is the *choice of the food itself*—plants, not animals. A reference is made in *PlantPure Nation* by a prominent family doctor that we now should begin to consider legislation to hold doctors responsible for not telling their patients about the health benefits of a whole-food, plant-based diet. Hopefully, this will encourage a national discussion of this matter.

I am of mixed opinion of this kind of mandate being directed from higher authority, because it may lead to legal consequences that do as much or more harm to the practice of medicine than it does good. I would prefer that (1) doctors get education in nutrition while in medical school (almost none at present!), (2) consumers be made aware of this information, and (3) programs and strategies be developed that adequately compensate doctors and serve the public the best possible information.

**FBA:** There seems to be a consensus that healthy food is more expensive. Why is this the case, and what could be done by the government and the food industry to make healthier food affordable and available to more Americans?

**Campbell:** Many consumers are now discovering that healthy food need not be more expensive. Some of the added costs are attributed to the purchase of organic produce. Not to discourage this practice (organic food tastes better and often is somewhat more nutritious), but it should be noted that the attendant health gains for organic foods are relatively minimal when compared with the primary practice of choosing the right produce in the first place. When total costs are factored into this equation, such as the costs to our society and our environment, it is far cheaper to produce and consume plant-based foods. Inform and educate consumers in a way that leads to greater demand for the right kind of food. During this transition, it may be useful to provide tax incentives for small farmers who can support local farmers markets. This issue also is considered in the film *PlantPure Nation*. ☺

### Editorial Policy

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