

*C. Dale McClain of Montgomery County, 114th president of the PBA*

## PROFILE

# Out to Create Connections and Build on Tradition

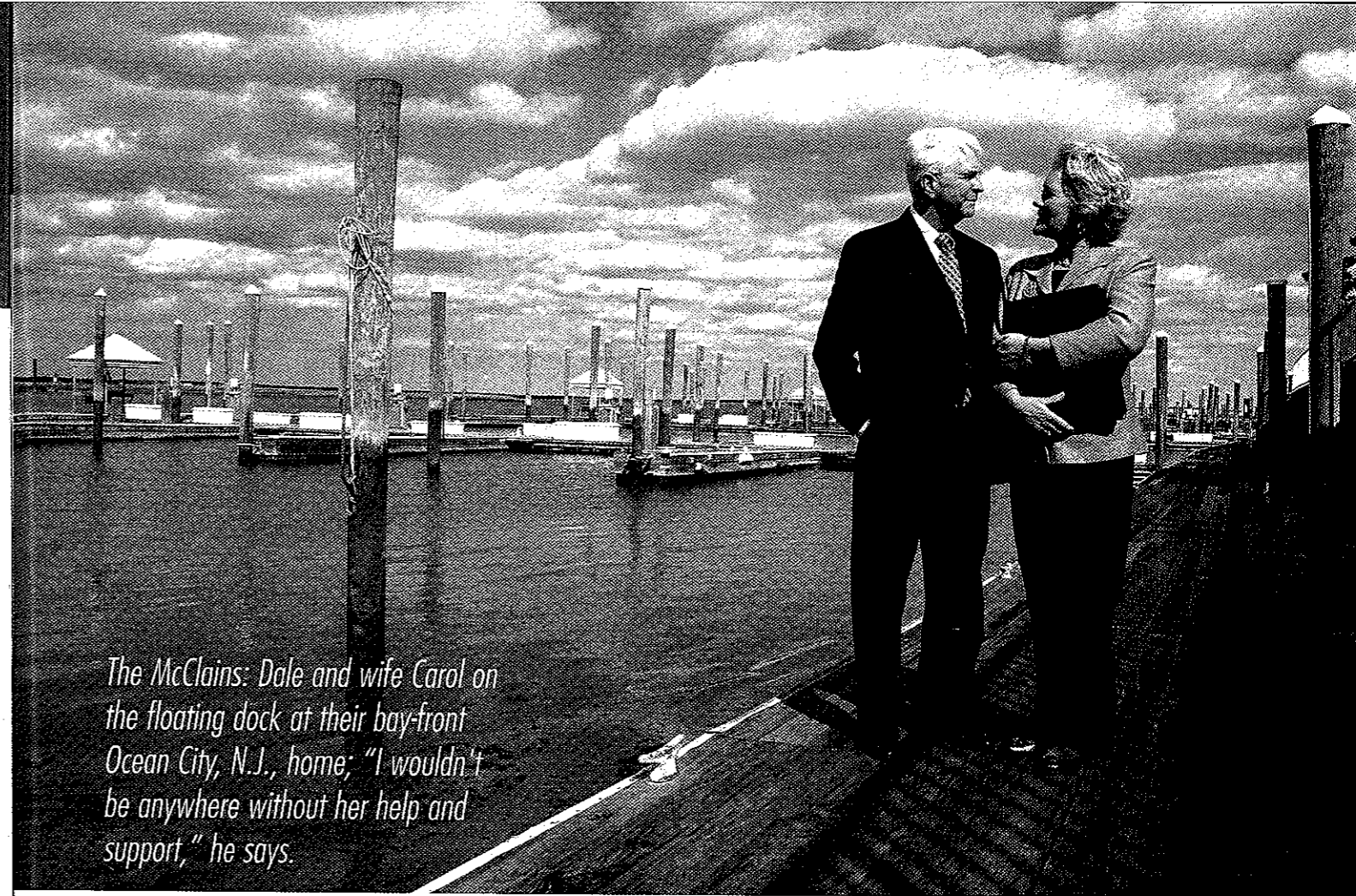
*Profile of incoming PBA President C. Dale McClain of Montgomery County*

By Ted Stellwag

The toothless brother was DeBennville "Bert" Bell, commissioner of the National Football League. His companion was John C. Bell Jr., who served briefly as governor and was then a justice and chief justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. And the precocious youngster who dipped their ice cream was C. Dale McClain, now a 70-year-old solo practitioner from Montgomery County. In June he will become the 114th president of the Pennsylvania Bar Association.

"I always liked talking to people," McClain says. "It's part of my Irish heritage. You learn something from everybody." Over time his conversations with the future chief justice turned to the possibility of a legal career. "That really opened him up," McClain recalls. "Justice Bell told me to study hard."

**T**he two brothers eating dime-a-dip ice cream were Sunday night regulars in the back booth at Shea's drugstore in Narberth. One always wore a rumpled sweatshirt and removed his false teeth, insisting they tainted the taste. The other was a more reserved Main Liner with a three-piece suit and briefcase. Fifty-seven years later, the soda jerk who waited on them remembers that it was Jane Logan ice cream — and they were big tippers.



*The McClains: Dale and wife Carol on the floating dock at their bay-front Ocean City, N.J., home; "I wouldn't be anywhere without her help and support," he says.*

Londa Salamon Photography, www.londaphotography.com; see ad in Marketplace

He needed no encouragement. "I was always the first kid at school," McClain says. He got good grades despite being dyslexic. Reading and spelling were particularly difficult. At age 12, McClain started working at his uncle Paul Shea's drugstore for 35 cents an hour: "I worked as many hours as he would let me." A lifetime later he's still energized by work. "I love what I do," he says simply.

Dale McClain's roots are in County Tipperary in the gentle, green hills of southern Ireland. His ancestors owned a pub, which he has visited. He was born at the Lying-In Hospital in Philadelphia founded by Benjamin Franklin. The McClains moved to Narberth, renting a tiny apartment across from the movie theater. "We were very poor, but my brother and I didn't know it," he says.

His father, Charles, was a three-letter athlete who became a mail carrier in Narberth. Some of McClain's best memories are of afternoons at the

racetrack with his dad. His mother, Betty, was a Republican committeewoman for many years. "She only went to fifth grade but was very smart," he says.

McClain became an Eagle Scout. He and past PBA President Albert P. Massey Jr. were scouts together. In addition to working at the drugstore, he worked for the post office and a local accountant and spent nights at the firehouse. "When the alarm came in, I opened the doors and got the first truck ready to go," he recalls. "I earned \$12 a shift and almost doubled it shooting pool."

McClain was still a fireman when he entered Villanova as a commuting student. Once he spent all night at a big fire when the floor collapsed under him: "I held onto that hose for dear life and didn't fall through." McClain took an exam the next morning still wearing boots and smelling of smoke. He was at the top of his class but says he considered dropping out. His dad was on disability

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The McClain family: Dale and Carol with their children in a family photo from Christmas 1989; seated, from left, are daughters Peri, Kelle and Erin; standing are sons Cary, left, and Bryan, right



and the odd jobs didn't cover costs. "The Augustinians made up the difference in my tuition," he says. "I owe a lot to Villanova." He graduated cum laude with a degree in economics.

McClain and PBA Past President Albert P. Massey Jr. were scouts together. PBA Past President John A. Carpenter lived up the street for a time.

McClain put a law career on hold. He went with the accounting firm of Price Waterhouse in Philadelphia and passed the certified public accountant exam. McClain did a shortened active-duty stint in the Air Force. His fire training qualified him to open an Air National Guard fire station at Philadelphia Airport. He later served as a judge advocate general officer in the Air Force Reserve, retiring as a major.

Thoughts of a legal career continued to percolate. McClain got a scholarship to Villanova University School of Law. He was on the law review editorial board and served as president of the student bar, graduating in 1964 with Order of the Coif honors. He also earned an LL.M. degree in taxation from the Temple University James E. Beasley School of Law.

McClain was hired by the Pepper firm in Philadelphia. George Wharton Pepper was a PBA founder. McClain rode the elevator with him while working in the same building at Price Waterhouse. "The man was a legend," he says. Pepper's nephew, Ernest Scott, continued his firm's support of volunteerism and bar activity. "They encouraged us and even paid the dues," McClain recalls. He volunteered at the public defender's office and chaired the Philadelphia Bar Association's Young Lawyers Division. Early in his career, McClain also served as special counsel for the Pennsylvania House Committee on Gang Warfare.

Desmond J. McTighe, the last PBA president from Montgomery County, was a neighbor. McClain remembers: "Our ball always landed in his garden." Past PBA President John A. Carpenter lived up the street for a time. Both prodded McClain to participate in the state bar. He listened and six years later chaired PBA's Young Lawyers Division, launching the popular bridge-the-gap program to help new admittees gain practical knowledge. Dale McClain knew then he wanted to be PBA president one day.

He left the Pepper firm to start a solo practice in Haverford. "I looked in the phone book," he says. "There were no lawyers there." McClain still has an office in Haverford, although most of his work is done at home in rural Worcester. The spacious townhouse backs onto the Peter Wentz farmstead, which was Washington's headquarters before Valley Forge.

Like his country doctor grandfather, McClain often sees clients at their homes or offices. "I make house calls," he says. He represents small businesses and does tax work and estate planning.

McClain relishes the freedom of soloing: "You get to choose what you want to do so long as you can manage your schedule and watch your money." He finds sales on office supplies and drives a 180,000-mile Honda. "For three years, we had all our kids in college," he recalls. His job as Lower Merion tax collector helped pay tuitions.

Carol McClain "grew up everywhere," according to her husband. Her father's work kept the family moving. She went to West Chester University, taught special education and managed a department

store. "Carol learned the computer and replaced two secretaries," he says. "She covers for me and knows my clients as well as I do. I wouldn't be anywhere without her help and support." Their children — Kelle, Peri, Cary, Bryan and Erin — are grown with their own careers. Cary is a lawyer in Ardmore. There are 10 grandchildren, with another expected soon.

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McClain works long hours at his practice but budgets time to volunteer. He has led several professional and community organizations, including the Delaware Valley Regional Finance Authority and the Malvern Retreat House. McClain also coached soccer and softball. "I really can't say no because I'm so fortunate to be alive," he explains.

Many of the McClain men have been afflicted with Huntington's Chorea, which attacks the central nervous system. "My father and grandfather, my uncle and younger brother, Walter, died from it," McClain says. "They all got it about age 42." He was spared and pledged to "give back to the community and the bar ... so long as something good can be done."

Dale McClain was president of the Montgomery Bar Association in 1990. He broadened participation in governance and still helps with financial management.

**Professional image:**

"I went with my grandfather to see patients. Everybody looked up to him. He never got rich, but he was loved. The town doctor and lawyer were well respected. ... That's changed and I don't think we can ever put it back in the box."

**Member benefits:**

"The PBA has done a very good job of meeting members' needs. The problem is lawyers are so busy they don't always look and see what's there to help them in practice."

**His worst trait:**

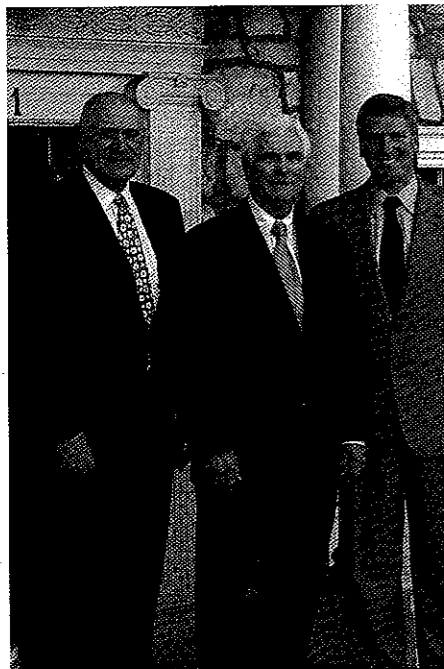
"I'm a pack rat. I don't throw anything away. It all means something to me."

**Lawyer jokes:**

"I'm not bothered by them because I can't remember them."

**Advertising:**

"I don't do it. I've been in local activities, so they know I'm a lawyer. ... Advertising demeans the profession. To get attention, you have to stretch ... and open yourself up to criticism."



Three leaders: Incoming PBA President McClain with predecessor, outgoing PBA President Andrew F. Susko, right, and successor, incoming PBA President-elect Clifford E. Haines, left, at the Maclay Mansion, the PBA's headquarters building, Harrisburg

A quarter century ago, McClain was the founding chair of the PBA's General (now Solo and Small Firm) Practice Section. He has headed the Conference of County Bar Leaders and the Elder Law Section, is a longtime member of the House of Delegates and has chaired its Rules and Calendar Committee. He has led several other committees, including Economics of Law Practice, Law Office Management, Member Benefits and Non-Dues Revenue. During his term as PBA treasurer, he focused on operating reserves.

He knows the association's mission has grown: "We didn't hear the words 'pro bono' when I started."

McClain also sits in the American Bar Association's House of Delegates. He received a Service to the Profession Award from the ABA General Practice, Solo and Small Firm Division last year. He has also earned several PBA awards, including one in 1980 for introducing low-cost computers into small law offices.

He claims that his computer skills were acquired through trial and error with help from Carol, clients and friends. "With learning disabilities, I have to write everything down on cheat sheets," he says. McClain appreciates the speed and accuracy of computers, which allow him to work from their shore home on the bay in Ocean City, N.J. There's a flip side. "The client wants it immediately," he notes. "You're not really able to think through the work product."

He points to the potential for increased electronic communication and is intrigu-

ed by the prospect of e-memberships, with some benefits available only online. McClain also foresees videoconferencing sites around the state for meetings and programs: "Instead of a half-day drive to Harrisburg, members could spend a couple hours closer to home."

The next president began his formal planning process last September. "PBA is on the leading edge of what we're doing, when you look at other bars," he notes. "I don't believe anything is a great leap forward. It's more incremental movement." He knows the association's mission has grown beyond the vision of Pepper and the founders: "We didn't hear the words 'pro bono' when I started."

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McClain wants the Board of Governors more involved in membership development and legislative outreach. He says he will run board meetings somewhat like a "retreat ... planning for the future." He also says he will encourage partnering of committees and sections with local bar counterparts: "If there isn't a connection, let's create one," he says. And he wants to build on the tradition of camaraderie and fellowship.

He sees the president as the "face of PBA" in the counties but wants to bundle visits



Marcy C. Mallory

to save time and money. He also hopes to broaden the scope of the Conference of County Bar Leaders to "take some of those good programs on the road" and says he will emphasize solo and small firms, noting they represent 62 percent of the PBA membership. Promising that he will continue to stress the involvement of women, minorities and young lawyers, McClain says he believes the youngest

practitioners find "a sense of accomplishment" in volunteering but that they expect clear parameters about a project and how long it will take.

Dale McClain champions the need to "make it easier for members to participate." He likens it to lessons learned long ago in the drugstore. "Uncle Paul knew what made each customer happy,"

Focused on planning: McClain with Samuel T. Cooper III of Harrisburg at the 2007 PBA Committee/Section Chairs' Planning Retreat

McClain recalls. "I've tried to model myself after him. I hope I'm remembered for helping this bar grow and serve our members." ☺




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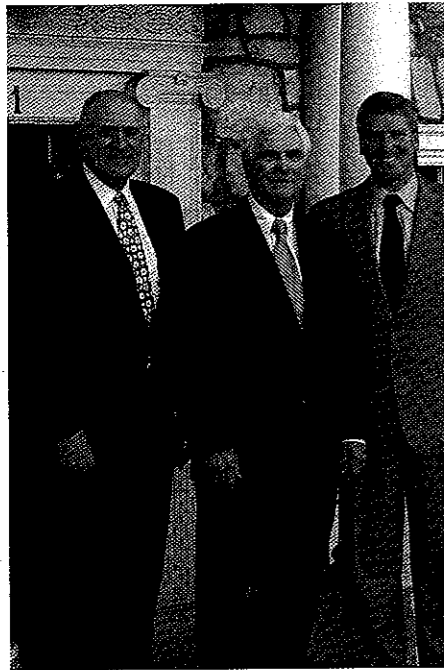


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- A persistent sad, anxious or "empty" mood;
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- Decreased energy, fatigue, feeling "slowed down";
- Sleeping problems (insomnia, oversleeping, early awakening);
- Appetite or weight change (increase or decrease);
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions;
- Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism;
- Feelings of worthlessness and guilt;
- Frequent crying or inability to cry;
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or a suicide attempt.

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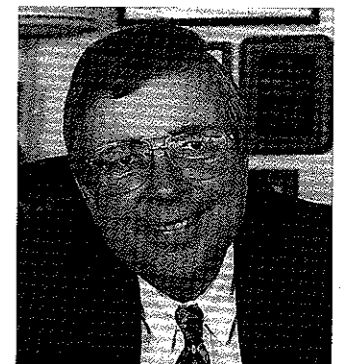
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