

New Matter

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Special Edition: Reflections On The Past Year & A Look At The Upcoming Year

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A Letter From 2004-2005 MIPLA President John Gresens



I am both proud and honored to serve as President of the Minnesota Intellectual Property Law Association for the 2004-2005 year. Since 1984 when I joined as a student member, MIPLA has doubled and more than redoubled in size. Regardless of individual member affiliation - private or corporate practice, solo practitioner or large organization, academic or judiciary - MIPLA's members are elite, highly qualified professionals.

Through individual and group activities, MIPLA regularly sponsors a variety of events: The Patent Roundtable; The Young Inventors Fair; scholarships for law students destined to practice in the field of intellectual property law; past support for the Minnesota Inventors Congress; various events in conjunction with USPTO personnel; and an active committee structure including CLE and social programs. MIPLA programs are regularly regarded as some of the best in the nation by visiting speakers and attendees.

MIPLA members are also active nationally. It is not uncommon to attend committee meetings for INTA, ABA/IPL or AIPLA, among others, where MIPLA members are prominent by their participation and leadership. (I have attended more than a few AIPLA and ABA/IPL committee meetings where a significant number of the attorneys present are MIPLA members.)

The recent economic downturn over the last few years has presented new challenges to bar associations across the nation. The boards of these associations have had to reevaluate their budget structure, the value provided to members, and even the basic mission of the organization. At the same time, members are weighing the value provided by the various associations against other organizations (e.g., private CLE providers). All this comes at a time when money has gotten tighter and continuing changes in the law of intellectual property have made us the "new tax lawyers" of this century. Notwithstanding, I am confident that MIPLA will rise to meet these challenges providing continuing value to its members, the bar, and the community-at-large.

As part of my efforts this year as MIPLA President, I will strive to:

Further develop MIPLA's identity and reputation as an organization with elite members providing the highest quality of services;

Develop new programs that invigorate interest in MIPLA from sectors which may not have been served before with the fullest intent or determination; and

Continue to develop inroads for MIPLA members in national organizations to ensure that MIPLA's reputation for leadership increases in prominence.

I look forward to a great year for MIPLA in service as your President.

Respectfully,

/ s /

John J. Gresens
President
MIPLA

Reflections On The Year Past



Even with an extra day (February 29, 2004), my year as MIPLA President seems to have flown by. Our Association has had another successful year. I like to think that I played some role in this success, but know that it is due solely to the collective efforts of our Board, Committee Chairs, committee members, and, of course, Sue Bores the MIPLA Administrator. I wish to express my sincere thanks to everyone that worked on MIPLA matters over the course of the year.

Our CLE efforts were re-invigorated this past year, and given in-coming President John Gresens' expertise, know that this will continue. Wonderful evening events were held. A random lunch program was initiated. Strong efforts were made to better connect with corporate Members. Lunch time committee roundtable discussions were consistently held, to the benefit of all in attendance. We continued our commitment to supporting the intellectual property law programs at each of the local law schools, as well as our support for the Young Inventors Fair and the Minnesota Inventors Congress. We have improved the mechanisms by which our Committees operate and communicate. Finally, we are one step closer to realizing a true upgrade in the MIPLA website. I am confident that these efforts will continue, so that our ever-growing Membership finds value in belonging to the Association.

I intend to remain active in MIPLA Committee work, and strongly suggest to anyone reading that they do the same. Please consider doing something "new" this year. Attend a meeting, speak at a CLE, suggest ideas to the Board, etc. I know that you will find it rewarding.

Best wishes to John, the Board, and the entire Association for another great year.

Tim Czaja, MIPLA-IPP (Immediate Past President)

Interview: Getting To Know Our Past President, Tim Czaja

by Eduardo Drake

Q: Tim, Thanks for agreeing to do this, and more importantly thanks for a great year at MIPLA. What led you into patent law?

A: In 1989, I was working as a process engineer at Advanced Circuits Inc., a printed circuit board manufacturer in Roseville, Minnesota. I began wondering whether "process engineering" was my life's calling. I asked my dad for advice; after all, he was (and is) constantly looking for opportunities to help. My father then introduced me to Hugh Jaeger, a local patent attorney. Hugh was kind enough to meet with me on several occasions, giving me the grand tour of the practice of intellectual property law, and in particular patent prosecution. You mean I will get paid to learn about new inventions and then write about them? I was hooked.

Q: What do I like most about your work?

A: I truly enjoy analytical writing (and fortunately, I consider patent applications to be analytical documents). I find great satisfaction in the mental process of distilling technical subject matter into a written document that both the inventors and patent practitioners view as being not only complete but readable. Opinions offer an equally satisfying opportunity. Heck, I even liked writing legal briefs.

Q: What do you think are the most significant challenges the patent or IP legal community faces in the next 5 to 10 years?

A: Furtherance of the global harmonization of patent laws, and its effect on United States patent practice. Obviously, decisions by the Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit play a major role in patent application drafting/filing strategies, as well as infringement analyses. Beyond the "challenges" inherently raised by any perceived or actual shift in interpretation of intellectual property law issues by the most-recent Federal Circuit decisions, however, is the big picture impact global harmonization may bring to United States patent practice. Fundamental changes, such as adoption of a first-to-file system, may dramatically alter the advice we give our clients and the manner in which we practice law.

Q: What do you think the future of MIPLA holds?

A: Though it was never my intention, I have been involved with the MIPLA Board for over six consecutive years. During that time, I have become increasingly aware of a general change in the way our Members view the importance of MIPLA. When I first began practicing as an attorney (and it was not that long ago), attending MIPLA functions was a given. I believe that most others held a similar view. While our membership continues to increase each year, it seems as though attendance at many MIPLA events, especially those viewed as being more social in nature, has remained stagnant or even decreased (except for the golf event). I am entirely aware of the time pressures we all face, both at work and at home. That said, I am concerned that many may view MIPLA events as being borderline frivolous, and thus not deserving of their time. I disagree. The MIPLA get-togethers are the primary way I stay in touch with other practitioners that I don't otherwise deal with on a daily basis. I do not see them as business opportunities; rather, they are simply a means for maintaining relationships and making new ones. Given the thankless efforts of committee chairs, the countless other benefits of MIPLA will always be there, such as New Matter, CLE's, presentations, informal group discussions, etc. However, we all may need to re-consider the importance of connecting with our profession; this in turn means connecting with others engaged in similar practice. MIPLA events are an easy way to accomplish this.

Q: Do you have any special hobbies or interests?

A: The MIPLA Golf Event! Seriously though, my primary interest is spending time with my family.

Q: Tell us one "funny" thing that no one you work with knows about you?

A: I met my [then-future] wife at the University of Minnesota. Not so "funny" except for the fact that when I met her, I was a Teaching Assistant in one of her classes. Everything was on the up-and-up, however; we didn't start dating until after the quarter was over.

Q: I've met your wife and can attest without out a doubt that you made an exceptional choice. Thanks again for a great year!