

Law association membership helps young lawyers stand out: FOLA

By AdvocateDaily.com Staff

Membership in a local law association can help new lawyers stand out from the crowd, says [The Federation of Ontario Law Associations'](#) (FOLA) new Chair Michael Winward.

Winward, who was elected on Nov. 9, tells AdvocateDaily.com that new calls to the bar are entering a profession that is arguably more competitive than at any time in history.

“There are a huge number of lawyers out there, and more coming,” says Winward, a partner with the Hamilton law firm [Mackesy Smye LLP](#), who notes that law school class sizes in Ontario have been getting bigger for years.

In addition, he says an unprecedented number of lawyers are qualifying here following the completion of law degrees abroad, while Ryerson University’s proposed law school is set to boost the number of Ontario barristers and solicitors even further.

“Work doesn’t come to you just because you’ve been called as a lawyer and in a field as competitive as this one, you have to market yourself,” Winward explains. “In addition to providing great client service, you need to make connections in your local community and in your profession, which is where joining a law association can help.”

He says his own career progression is a perfect example of the value of a law association membership.

Winward joined the Hamilton Law Association (HLA) soon after his call to the bar in 1985, and he says cut-price memberships available at many local law associations make this the best time to sign up. At the HLA, new lawyers can purchase an annual membership for just \$80. In Ottawa, the County of Carleton Law Association has a special rate for the first three years after a call, while fresh calls can join the [Toronto Lawyers Association](#) for free.

“I’ve been a member for more than 30 years, and it’s been very advantageous for my career,” Winward says. “I’ve received referral work, made lifelong friends and met a large number of extremely interesting people.

“The opportunities are enormous,” he adds.

Winward’s first volunteer role within the HLA was as a member of its library excellence committee. He went on to join the association’s executive, before serving as its president.

That led to an invitation to join the board of FOLA as a regional representative, and ultimately to the Chair of the group which serves as the voice of more than 12,000 lawyers who belong to its 47 law associations across the province.

Winward says membership in a law association is particularly valuable for sole practitioners looking to make professional connections within their local community. However, he says it can also give a business development a head start to those, like himself, who practise with others in law firms, both large and small.

“At some point, your partners will be looking to you to generate revenue and clients, which is something you don’t learn at law school,” he says. “For me, the very first step you can take in that direction is to join a law association.”