NYCLA Annual Meeting
May 23, 2019
Annual Report
Michael J. McNamara, President

**Introduction**

This has been a truly momentous period in the history of NYCLA

Last month the Board of Directors unanimously approved the relocation of NYCLA’s headquarters to 28 Liberty and the sale of this building, subject to the approval of the New York State Attorney General, which is currently underway

We hope – fingers crossed -- to be able to move into our new home early next year

I stand here tonight extremely proud of the work we have done together, very excited that NYCLA is poised to take such a big step forward and highly optimistic about its future

**THE VISIONING EXERCISE AND THE STATE OF PLAY IN MAY 2017**

The decision to relocate to 28 Liberty did not just happen, it was the culmination of a carefully thought out and deliberative
process that began during the Presidency of my predecessor, Carol Sigmond

With the guidance of architects from Gensler, in 2016 we engaged in an extensive “visioning” exercise in which a broad cross-section of NYCLA’s leaders and staff provided input on what an optimal space for the Association would look like.

As a result of that process, we outlined a detailed program for our future space and the activities we planned to conduct.

The visioning exercise underscored that this building, as grand and beloved as it was, was probably no longer the right fit for NYCLA.

A large library with shelves lined with bound books was a tremendous asset in 1930, but today’s lawyers need state of the art technology, including wi-fi and computers.

Much of our interaction today is virtual so NYCLA no longer requires a 60,000 square foot building; we need flexible space that can be expanded and divided, with video monitors and conferencing capability.
Far too much money and time was being spent on the operation of this building every year, including sky-high New York City property taxes

And the condition of the building was a significant concern with crises that occur with alarming regularity – broken sewer pipes, boiler repair issues and so on

We joked that we were in the real estate management business

And we knew from a study commissioned years earlier that the cost of a substantial renovation of this building would be astronomical

That was the state of play in May 2017 when I became President and we set out to investigate our real estate options

**INVESTIGATING OUR OPTIONS**

Over the past 2 years we devoted an enormous amount of time to exploring those options, working with real estate advisors, architects and lawyers, studying financial models and test fits of space and ultimately negotiating and executing contracts
With the help of our real estate advisors from CBRE, this building was marketed and shown to a wide range of potential purchasers and a team of leaders and staff toured more than 30 different properties in search of a new potential home for NYCLA.

We considered everything: Class A space, Class B space, law school space, brand new space, properties that needed substantial renovation, purchases, leases.

It was a long and, at times, frustrating process with false starts, twists and turns along the way.

And at times it seemed like we might not succeed.

**NYCLA’S NEW HOME**

The good news is that – miraculously – we were able to reach agreement on both transactions and the really great news is that the space at 28 Liberty was far and away our first choice.

It is a great space in a great building.

In our new home, NYCLA’s members and staff will benefit from state of the art technology.
We will have a large multi-purpose room that can accommodate big gatherings like this meeting or be divided into smaller spaces.

We will have a modern library; conference rooms that our members can use and where committee meetings can be held; a coffee bar; improved furnishings; lots of glass and natural light; nice views.

Our staff will have working spaces that will make it easier to do their jobs and that will be more conducive to collaboration.

And our new home will be in a first-class building that has been completely upgraded and renovated with millions of dollars of improvements, filled with amenities and very convenient to transportation and the courts.

It is exactly the 21st Century home for NYCLA that we envisioned at the outset and it will position the Association for long-term success.

Of course, parting with the building that we have called home all these years is not easy and the fact that this is likely our last Annual Meeting here is bittersweet.
This building, this auditorium in particular, is filled with history and wonderful memories

I have my own personal list of special moments here that I will never forget

But after 89 years it is time for a change

By selling the building we will be able to create a new space much better suited to the needs of today’s lawyers, we will put NYCLA on a much sounder financial footing for years to come and future leaders and staff will be able to focus on our members and the mission of the Association instead of real estate management

And we know that the significance of NYCLA is about more than any building or room

Charles Evans Hughes, our most famous and accomplished President, put it this way in a message that was delivered on the day this building was dedicated in May 1930:

“As books and office furniture do not make a lawyer, so a library and reception halls do not make a bar association.”
The true significance of NYCLA lies in its commitment to remain an open and inclusive bar association where everyone is welcome and feels welcome;

In its role as a thought leader unafraid to take controversial positions;

In its outstanding legal education programs;

In its tireless advocacy for improvements to the administration of justice and staunch defense of the judiciary;

In its innovative and award-winning pro bono programs that help so many New Yorkers in need;

In the important work of our Committees;

In special events such as the Annual Dinner where we celebrate the accomplishments of lawyers and Judges;

And in the Members and Staff who make NYCLA such a special Community
All of that will be moving with us to 28 Liberty along with the cherished memories of the past

So, there’s still work to be done by leadership and staff but we are very excited about the next chapter at NYCLA

In that regard, as some of you will recall, at the Annual Meeting in 2017 Carol Sigmond presented me with a toy hammer and moving van, symbolizing the choices I would be facing during my Presidency

In that same spirit, I want to give our next President, Steve Lessard, and our Executive Director, Sophia Gianacoplos, items that they can use for the tasks that lie ahead

Kudos to my assistant, Mary Nielsen, who put the NYCLA logos on the moving trucks

**Conclusion**

It has been a tremendous honor and privilege to be the President of NYCLA these past 2 years and to have had a hand the shaping its future of this great bar association
There are a number of people who have been incredibly helpful and supportive that I would like to thank publicly

First, I want to thank my wife, Maryellen, the very best partner in life I could imagine, for encouraging me to do this, for her wise and patient counsel throughout and for reminding me what is and is not important in our lives

Thanks also to my children, Christopher and Megan, who are both here tonight. They stole the show when they introduced me at my induction and they have been unwavering in their support and encouragement during the past 2 years

The real estate project was a true NYCLA team effort

A special shout out to all the people who were deep in the real estate trenches with me the past two years, especially Sophia Gianacoplos, Steve Lessard, Vince Chang, Adrienne Koch, Anthe Bova and Richard Swanson as well as our real estate advisors from CBRE, our architects from Gensler and our lawyers from DLA Piper

My thanks also to the other members of my Executive Committee for the past 2 years – Magistrate Judge Stewart Aaron, Secretary Asha Smith, Susan Lindenauer, Jim Kobak, Jai Chandrasekhar, Dyan Finguerra-DuCharme, and Immediate Past
President Carol Sigmond – who endured more than 40 Executive Committee and board meetings and were deeply immersed in all of the real estate issues and decision-making

Thanks also to the other members of our Board of Directors

NYCLA is fortunate to have an engaged Board comprised of smart, dedicated people who care deeply about this organization

I am especially grateful for the way you all came together unanimously in support of this historic decision

Last but certainly not least many thanks to the NYCLA Staff

What we accomplish here every year is remarkable and I am so grateful for your support during these past 2 years

Please join me in a round of applause for our outstanding Executive Director, Sophia Gianacoplos, Anthe Bova, Bari Chase, Toni Valenti, Azelia Cutts and the rest of the staff