When Anne N. John, a private practitioner in Uniontown, enters the Fayette County Courthouse, she addresses every security guard by name. It’s criminal court week, so the courthouse is bustling. Walking briskly through the courthouse, she greets everyone she passes, most of them by name. She tosses off historic facts and points out interesting architectural details of the building, peeks into a courtroom where a murder trial is in progress, chats with the bailiff, confers with two colleagues and engages in a text message exchange. All this while she continues to say hello to everyone she encounters. Passing the Recorder of Deeds office, John asks for indulgence as she enjoys a bit of nostalgia. This office, with its shelves of gigantic deed books, is where, as a young girl, she would find her father when she sought him out to get her lunch money during the school day.

She exhibits a sense of both familiarity and wonder, as if she knows this is what she was meant to do with her life, yet she can’t believe her good fortune in being able to do it. “I pretty much never thought of doing anything else but law. I did fantasize about being a ballerina, but it was the law that won out. I grew up watching my father,” John said.

In short, she is a combination of Atticus Finch and Scout Finch, raised by a gentleman lawyer to practice law with professionalism, dignity and respect above all. Like Atticus, her integrity guides her decisions and her efforts to treat everyone with kindness and respect, fairly and equally. Like Scout, she is curious and quick-witted, with basic faith in the goodness of the people in her community. Those traits will define her role as the PBA’s 2019-20 president. John wants to see members “raise the bar on the perception of lawyers throughout society. It is a noble profession. The nobility and professionalism with how we treat each other is a natural extension of what we afford to society,” she said.

John has been practicing with her family since 1983. Her father, the late Bernard T. John, first practiced with Ira B. Coldren Jr., the second PBA president from Fayette County. He was later with Ray, Buck, Margolis, Mahoney and John.

“When I was in high school, the daughter of my dad’s law partner and I would take turns going into the office on Saturdays to answer the phones,” she said. To her,
practicing law meant being fully engaged in the community. “I saw how my dad helped people. In a small community, you see the people you represent all over town. I remember clients bringing my father cases of fruit.”

Her father and mother raised four children with the understanding that with opportunity comes responsibility. “Part of that involves using your opportunities to the betterment of our profession and, by extension, our community. We were all raised with the sense of giving back to the community,” John said.

Her sister Sadie, now retired, worked for a Pittsburgh utility company as a manager of customer relations, which included helping low-income people get utility assistance, and her brother Mark was a middle school teacher and a coach. Her other brother, Simon B. John, was assistant public defender as part of the first such office in Fayette County from 1968 to 1978, and they continue to work together.

John met her husband, PBA member Dan McDyer of Pittsburgh, when they were opposing counsel for a case in Fayette County. They didn’t date until later, but she recognized his sense of responsibility and community involvement; his first job out of law school was with an indigent law program. Three of her nephews also practice law.

John is the youngest sibling by more than 10 years. When she was in grade school, her mother, Elizabeth (Libby) took a job as a tax preparer. “She was good in the sciences and was really good in math. After school, I would go to her office and wait for her. This was before calculators. My mother could do all the math in her head,” she said. Her mother was “a riot,” John said, and kept the family laughing.

Every afternoon at 4 when the stock market closed, her father would walk to Parket/Hunter stockbrokers and watch the ticker to find out how his stocks had done that day. She and her mother and
whichever other sibling was available would meet him at the local drugstore coffee counter. “It was life in a small town, where everyone knew everyone else, and we were all like family,” she said.

John’s career pretty much fell together, she said as she laughed. After graduating from St. John’s High School, she attended Dickinson College and then Dickinson School of Law. She loved college and law school and living in Carlisle, but she returned to Uniontown and waited for her bar exam results. Her father, who was 73 at the time, had to be hospitalized for a short time. Her brother Simon was already practicing with their father and needed some help in the office. She agreed to help and she never left.

“I didn’t think I’d ever get a situation like this. Whether you’re practicing with a family member or you’re in solo practice, you have some flexibility that is great, but there is also incredible responsibility. On the other hand, I can’t tell you how often I walked from my office to my father’s and asked him a question. There was never a question he couldn’t answer. He was always patient and thoughtful,” John said.

When John arrives at her office every morning, she takes off her jacket and puts on her black cardigan. “It helps me focus and think. My dad used to do the same thing,” she said.

Her father, like many other lawyers in Fayette County, had a key to the courthouse so that they could go in and do title searches at night. “It was just normal. It’s our community,” she said. Her father also greeted everyone he came across in the courthouse and on the street. “You do what you see. There is no difference in people, and we’re all trying to get through this life the best we can so we can help each other.”

One day in 1996, Bernard said he had a headache and was going to go home. He later had a stroke and passed away. He was 86 and still as sharp as a tack, still practicing law every day. His office is filled with pictures of children and grandchildren, bar mementos and scholarly publications. Both Anne and Simon use it on occasion. The office manager, Robin Hill, has been with the firm since the day she graduated from high school. Hill’s sister Pam Conn has worked there nearly as long. Susan Wallace staffs the front reception desk, a position she has held for years. People stay in that office.

“We often talk about giving everyone a seat at the table. I think it should be a comfortable seat. We need to let a person know that everyone has value and every-one’s value should be respected. We’re all the same. You do what you do, and I do what I do. The bottom line is it’s all about treating others how you want to be treated,” John said.

Lawyers are in unique positions to provide people with guidance and assistance that see them through often difficult situations. “We can provide the help they need. We’re the last line of defense. We can and should be the voice of those who need help expressing their voice,” she said.

John has been involved in the PBA since childhood. She attended Midyear Meetings
with her family for many years and she continues that tradition by taking her children to those meetings. In law school, she was active in the student bar association. As a Young Lawyers Division member, she was the district coordinator for the High School Mock Trial Competition. John was a Zone 6 Governor representing Fayette, Greene, Washington and Westmoreland counties from 2009 to 2012. She ran for PBA secretary and served in that office from 2013 to 2016. Then she ran for vice president.

She has served as a course planner and speaker for the Pennsylvania Bar Institute on numerous oil and gas issues, including lease interpretation, groundwater contamination and litigation. She was president of the Fayette County Bar Association, where she served as secretary from 2006 to 2013, and has served several terms on its board of directors. Her community involvement extends beyond the law and includes past service on the board of directors of the Better Business Bureau of Western Pennsylvania and the Mt. Lebanon Aqua Club, as well as volunteering at numerous other community events.

John is a past co-chair of the Shale Energy Law Committee, past chair of the Leadership Recruitment and Development Committee, vice chair of the Review and Certifying Board and chair of the House of Delegates Draft Committee. She has served as a member of the PBA Diversity Team as well as its predecessor, the Diversity Task Force, and is a Life Fellow of the Pennsylvania Bar Foundation. In 2015, she was recognized for her work as co-vice chair of the PBA Strategic Planning Committee.

“I could never see myself without the PBA. It truly is my other partner. The PBA has provided me with a home within the broader legal community. It has given me an opportunity to see lawyers from a diverse set of backgrounds and practices, and I’m constantly reinforced in my knowledge. We are all in this profession together. We all have the same common goals,” she said.

As PBA president, John wants to focus on assisting lawyers in the profession of law, which includes the discharge of their obligations as members of the legal profession. Her more concrete goals focus on strengthening membership and increasing member engagement.

“I think committees are great opportunities for members to learn and network. We’re putting a new spin on the Plain English Committee. It’s now called the Clear
“We need to be mindful of the impact we have every day on our clients and our communities. We need to be worthy of our leadership roles and mindful that we are leaders in our communities.”

Communications Committee. With the prevalence of electronic and digital communications, I see an opportunity to provide assistance to our members, where they can assist each other formulating communications and how we communicate in various forms of media,” John said.

PBA Immediate Past President Charles Eppolito III fostered relationships with law school deans. John accompanied him to meet with the then-dean of Duquesne University School of Law and former Superior Court Judge, Maureen Lally-Green. “Law school students are important and are a large component of our bar. I think it’s also important to involve the academics. In creating a Legal Academics Committee, we now offer a home for law school faculty and administrators to meet and exchange ideas for the betterment of our future lawyers. It’s a natural extension of what Chuck started with the deans,” John said.

She is also considering a committee to help lawyers in transition, whether faced with a sudden circumstance forcing them to leave practice or supporting those who need to review their practice. “This would help lawyers and those who work with them as well as that community. It goes back to the idea that we are a community. We are colleagues and work together to the extent that we can help each other.”

John said, “If we are mindful of our relationships with each other, it is only natural that lawyers will be drawn to the PBA for professional growth.” Community service is a large component of what lawyers do as a whole, and millennials rank community service very highly in their professional and personal lives. “I think this is a way to get new lawyers involved in the PBA. We can strengthen the community, and that is very compelling to me.”

She would like to refashion the PBA Stepping Out program, a series of pamphlets for recent high school graduates that describe life skills such as how to buy a car or how to rent an apartment. “I’d like to resurrect these in some way that makes sense for today’s high school students.”

John and her husband have four children all together: Kristine, a graduate of Vassar and Case Western, is an analyst supervisor for a national insurance company; Michael is a ticket collector at Pittsburgh Steelers games and an usher at Pittsburgh Pirates games. He enjoys attending the PBA Midyear Meetings and has had adventures such as swimming with dolphins and sting rays. Matthew has a business degree from Penn State University and works in administration as a client account specialist in Pittsburgh. Elizabeth (Libby) is a high school senior preparing for college and a 200 medley relay gold medal winner in the Western Pennsylvania High School Swimming Championships in 2018 and 2019.

When she is not working, John spends time with her family and has been the announcer for home high school and Aqua Club swim meets. She loves to garden and putter in her yard, and she loves to read spy thrillers.

The ethos of a multi-generational family vocation with a long and distinguished history of service is captured in the mission of her practice: “We believe that the practice of law is a noble profession, and we are committed to serving our clients with personal attention and dedication. We also believe that an individual’s access to justice through legal representation is the cornerstone of a strong community.” True to her family’s tradition, a deep sense of personal obligation to clients, community and the law defines Anne John, the 2019-20 PBA president. As she stated, “Law practice affects people’s lives. We need to be mindful of the impact we have every day on our clients and our communities. We need to be worthy of our leadership roles and mindful that we are leaders in our communities.”

Anne and her family in Paris, from left: Michael, Elizabeth, Anne, Dan and Matthew

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