For Potter County family and immigration law attorney Guerline L. Laurore, participating in the PBA’s Bar Leadership Institute was like opening a door to complete access to the statewide bar and its leaders.

For Bernard “B.J.” John, a Fayette County general practitioner, the institute was “a catalyst for activity in the PBA.”

Both young lawyers have taken on leadership roles within the PBA since completing the 2010-11 Bar Leadership Institute (BLI) class. That’s exactly what BLI is meant to do — help develop the next generation of PBA leaders while immersing them in how the bar association functions.

“This demystifies it and makes it naviga-
table to them,” said PBA Immediate Past President Gretchen A. Mundorff, who relaunched the BLI during her presidency in 2010. “They get an exposure so they understand where all the pieces of the PBA puzzle fit together.”

BLI members learn about the day-to-day operations, governance, resources and staffing of the association. They are required to attend the PBA Young Lawyers Division (YLD) Summer Meeting; a series of fall PBA meetings in Harrisburg, including Committee/Section Day and the Board of Governors and House of Delegates meetings; and the Conference of County Bar Leaders in February. And they are encouraged to participate in other association events.

In late March the PBA Bar Leadership Institute Committee will begin accepting applications for the 2012-13 BLI class. The committee is looking for a diverse group, and that includes each candidate’s practice setting, size of firm and type of practice as well as gender and racial background.

Each class is usually limited to 10 members. The criteria to be eligible for the BLI are demonstration of leadership ability in some capacity; willingness to make the time commitment to the seven-month program; being currently licensed to practice law in Pennsylvania; and being age 38 or younger or having practiced five years or less. Being a member of the PBA is required but prior active participation in the PBA is not.

Each participant is paired with a mentor from the PBA Board of Governors. Class members also receive guidance from Bar Leadership Institute Committee Co-Chairs Mary E. Schellhammer and Paul C. Troy.

“Rather than just reading or hearing from others about how the PBA functions, the BLI offers young lawyers a chance to go to Board of Governors meetings and see PBA leadership for themselves,” said Troy. “I’m sure that less than 1 percent of our membership ever gets to attend a Board of Governors meeting during their careers, and probably less than 5 percent ever attend the House of Delegates meeting. The BLI gives these young lawyers an opportunity to do these things early in their careers.”

Troy added that a more important benefit for BLI members is the chance to interact socially with PBA leaders and other class members.

“The greatest benefit I have received from the PBA has been the friends I have made over the years. The BLI offers 10 to 11 young lawyers a chance to get away from their desks and develop similar relationships,” said Troy. “Whether or not they ultimately decide to seek leadership positions in the PBA, the friendships they de-
velop with their class members and other lawyers will hold a timeless value for them both professionally and personally.”

Schellhammer, a member of the first BLI class, said, “We hope the return will be that we increase their interest in the bar and increase the sense of family that we have in the bar.”

“We want to expose them to how the bar really functions and how many hours it takes to make it all work for the bar members. We don’t expect everyone to devote that kind of attention to the bar, but we need people to do that.”

According to Schellhammer, the BLI prepares participants for different types and levels of leadership. “You don’t need to be a section chair or committee chair,” she said. “You can be a strong member of a committee. The BLI exposes young lawyers to how policy is made. It helps them see they could be writing policy. They could be presenting it to the board or they could be a board member deciding it.”

The BLI program was developed during the 1995-96 term of PBA Past President Arthur L. Piccone. He tapped Mundorff to serve as the first chair of BLI, which ran for a number of years before being sunsettled. Mundorff — a proponent of leadership development and mentoring — says she revived the BLI during her presidency in an effort to reach and train future PBA leaders as well as to aid in the PBA’s quest for diversity. Pleased with the success of the re-launched program, she describes it as “a small investment for us to make that reaps great dividends and rewards for the association.”

PBA Special Projects Coordinator Susan Eter, who has worked closely with the 2010-11 and 2011-12 BLI classes, said, “I’m very excited for the future of the PBA. We have excellent, dedicated young lawyers who are eager and willing to step into leadership roles at all levels. They just need personal encouragement and an invitation. The BLI program has reminded me how very important it is for current PBA leaders and members to reach out to young members and to make them feel welcomed and valued. That’s how we will grow the PBA.”

2010-11 BLI class members Laurore and John are just two examples of how the program and the opportunities it presents are paying off.

When Laurore, principal of the Law Office of Guerline L. Laurore PC, applied to BLI, she was a member of the PBA’s Minority Bar Committee but was not very active. As a BLI class member she studied the PBA’s structure and found new connections with leaders and her mentor, PBA Zone 11 Gov. Ann B. Wood. Through the BLI Laurore learned there was a House of Delegates vacancy in her zone. By November 2010, while still a BLI class member, she had been appointed to serve in the House.

“BLI is the open door to the PBA,” says Laurore. “It’s the VIP section. Everybody, once they know you’re a member of the class — the board members, committee chairs — they come greet you and talk to you about how you can become involved.”

Since completing the BLI, Laurore has taken on more leadership positions within the PBA, including as chair of the Law-Related Education Committee, co-vice chair of the Immigration Law Committee and council member of the Solo and Small Firm Practice Section. In May 2011 Laurore received the PBA Young Lawyers Division’s Michael K. Smith Excellence in Service Award. She was also recently named a “Rising Star” by the PBA Minority Bar Committee. According to Laurore, none of that would have happened if it weren’t for her involvement in the BLI. “It was the best experience of my career,” she said.

John, the Fayette County attorney, said, “It is safe to say that the BLI has been the catalyst for my activity in the PBA. There is no doubt about it.”

John was practicing law in Washington, D.C., before joining his father and aunt at John & John, a private practice in Uniontown, in 2008. He says he had been a PBA and Fayette County Bar Association member but did not become active with either until returning to Pennsylvania.

“I had no working knowledge of the PBA structure. I didn’t know any of the leadership. I certainly never had an introduction with the president,” he said.

Upon entering BLI, John says he connected with peers from across the state and...
The PBA Bar Leadership Institute provides emerging leaders, representing a broad cross-section of the diversity of the PBA membership, with an opportunity to learn about the PBA while actively participating in key meetings. Participation in the Bar Leadership Institute provides numerous opportunities to network with PBA members and leadership and helps build lasting relationships that will serve as an invaluable resource for future success.

The Bar Leadership Institute looks to the future of the organization by developing well-informed, committed leaders who will serve the PBA for many years to come. It familiarizes participants with the day-to-day operation of the association, provides a foundation on governance and policy issues and introduces the participants to PBA staff and resources.

If you know a young leader reach out and encourage him or her to apply.

If you are a young leader, visit the PBA website for details and to complete an application.

Applications for the 2012-2013 PBA BLI class are due May 18, 2012. Everything you need is on the website: www.pabar.org/bli.asp

from a wide range of practice areas and that his BLI mentor, PBA Zone 12 Gov. Hal D. Coffey, became a great resource, putting him in touch with other attorneys in larger neighboring counties, discussing cases and sharing his own PBA experiences.

Like Laurore, John was tapped to become a PBA House of Delegates member during his time in the BLI. He has since been appointed the YLD Zone 6 chair, which he said would not have happened if it weren’t for the networking opportunities that the BLI brought his way. “It was a real honor and privilege to be a member of the class,” said John.

To those thinking of applying, Laurore said this: “Even if it looks like you’re not going to get in, even if it looks like you’re not going to have time, even if it looks like it’s going to be difficult, do it anyway because it’s going to pay off [in] the exposure, the networking, the learning experience.”

For the deadline and application requirements, check the BLI page on the PBA website at www.pabar.org/bli.asp. For more information, contact Susan Etter at the PBA, 800-932-0311, Ext. 2256, or susan.etter@pabar.org.

Guerline L. Laurore of Potter County, member of the BLI class of 2010-11, now chair of the PBA Law-Related Education Committee and recently named a “Rising Star” by the PBA Minority Bar Committee.

Bernard John of Fayette County, member of the BLI class of 2010-11, now PBA YLD Zone 6 chair and a member of the PBA House of Delegates.