



June Essis, partner at Weber Gallagher Simpson Stapleton Fires & Newby. Courtesy photo

June Essis, a partner with Weber Gallagher Simpson Stapleton Fires & Newby who primarily defends trucking companies and truck drivers, recently began her term as the 2022-23 president of the Philadelphia Association of Defense Counsel.

According to Essis, the pandemic served to strengthen the relationship between PADC and the members of the legal community. In a conversation with The Legal Intelligencer, Essis said she aims to encourage the increased communications between the judiciary and the bar and continue PADC's revamped virtual programming as the organization plans to bring back in-person events.

The Legal Intelligencer: How has the association's approach to programming during the pandemic changed in the past year?

June Essis: Well, it's changed in the past couple years. When COVID hit, we went completely virtual. I have to give credit to the leadership in PADC, because we immediately changed gears and started offering monthly CLE programming free to our members and for a nominal amount

to our non-members completely virtually. We also handled the CLE crediting with the Pennsylvania accrediting association to get virtual credits allowed through this process.

It really turned out to be wonderful because we were able to offer these exceptional speakers who were available due to the convenience of the programming and the limited interruption of their working day because they were virtual. ...

We had unbelievable attendance at these webinars and we continue to see so, and people are very enthusiastic about the programming. It's relevant, it's up to date, it's timely, and it's free to all membership. ... Because of the incredible response from speakers who wanted to participate, we were able to provide additional webinars during the several months free to members. I think we had 19 webinars last year in addition to our monthly standard regular webinars. ...

We're hopeful that in addition to continuing to offer these webinars virtually that we will be in person. And we're hoping, starting this fall, to have in-person luncheon [programs], if the pandemic restrictions remain stable.

Another bonus I would say is that we really had a lot of access to the judiciary and the plaintiffs bar, and we all worked together to come up with protocols during the pandemic to keep litigation moving forward, and that created some really nice communication and conversation. We were able to accomplish a lot with each other and advance advocacy of the defense and increase the relationship with the judiciary and the plaintiffs bar.

The Legal: How has the pandemic altered the role of PADC and how it functions in the legal community?

Essis: I think it's strengthened its role, because we were looked to for information and insight. Not every lawyer can contact a judge and say, "Hey, what's going on," but as the organization we can work with the plaintiffs bar in conjunction with judiciary. We had some townhall meetings, we had open-forum meetings, we had the judges instruct on how they wanted to proceed, and we were able to interject what we felt was appropriate for our bar in helping to move the cases forward in an appropriate way during COVID. It became really essential. ...

I always think the plaintiffs bar is moving forward and advocating for their clients, so of course the defense bar is doing the same. And we're in the unique position of being able to obtain everybody's opinions as to how to handle going forward and being able to provide those opinions to the courts so that they could choose how to move forward.

Quite frankly, they were exceptional. I thought the judiciary handled the ever-changing issues during COVID in a terrific ways for all parties, all plaintiffs and defense counsel to move forward with their matters appropriately.

The Legal: In this coming year, what are your big priorities?

Essis: I want to continue to offer relevant, timely CLE programming. I think that's really important to our membership. I want to continue to offer great speakers and offer our membership the opportunity to speak and publish and participate in PADC, because I think that's how you increase membership. ... I'd like to complete updating our website to make it useful to all our members with an expert database that's current and recordings of all our programming. ...

I continue to encourage an increase in membership through participation in PADC. I want to continue working with the judiciary, strengthen those relationships, and continue our community outreach and our diversity and inclusion program. I feel like PADC is an organization for all defense bar members, and there's something that we offer that everyone can participate in and get involved in.

The Legal: What are some of the specific things that you're doing to attract new membership, and a more diverse membership?

Essis: First of all, the membership fee for a regular attorney is really reasonable compared to any other organization. But what we have done with these law firms is we have offered discounts, so if you have 10 or more members, you can get a 10% discount; if you have 15 or more members, you can get a 15% discount; 20 or more members you get a 20% discount. So that has worked really well in the last couple of years to increase large firm membership. ...

We have 13 committees. We want people to participate in committees, we want new ideas, we want new energy from young lawyers. We're encouraging those members to get involved in all the different programming that we have. We have specific young lawyer programming, we have events for young lawyers so that they can network with each other and build relationships.

The Legal: What do you see as the biggest challenges that the organization faces?

Essis: There are several of them, I guess. I don't know if they're big challenges, but we certainly are going to see something unique in providing in-person events again. We're hopeful that people will attend those in-person events, as they've been sitting at their desks for two and a half years. ... We want to encourage the defense bar to network with each other and get

involved and invite the judiciary to those events that we have, include them so that people feel connected and build relationships again.

I think that's been something that's been lacking during COVID, and it's important. We also want to get people to continue working with our affinity groups and promoting diversity, equity and inclusion. I think we have a robust awareness of all that, and I've had women's conferences and diversity webinars. We want to increase that as well.

The Legal: Are there any big pieces of legislation that PADC is looking out for in the coming year?

Essis: We have a great legislation committee that gets notification of all the new legislation that comes in, whether it regards the auto law or products cases, and instructs the membership on that. We have a really robust amicus committee that has been really diligent in working on advocating for proper jury instructions in product cases.

The Legal: Anything else you think we should know?

Essis: I'm honored to be president. It's a tremendous organization. I look forward to continuing their mission this year and being their president. I have found that my membership in this association and my work has been engaging and rewarding.