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Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association Names New Executive Director

CLEVELAND – March 26, 2010 – The Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association (CMBA) announces that David R. Watson of Chesterton, Ind., has been chosen as the new executive director of the CMBA and the Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Foundation (CMBF).

Watson, a Cleveland native, said, “I’m looking forward to coming home to Cleveland and using my accumulated experiences to strengthen an already-strong bar association, give every attorney in our community a reason to belong to their bar association and then to leverage that strength for the good of Greater Cleveland.”

Watson was approved by a special joint session of the CMBA and CMBF Boards of Trustees on Wednesday and will start in early April. He replaces former Executive Director D. Larkin Chenault, who resigned late 2009 to become executive director of the Connecticut Bar Association. The CMBA’s General Counsel K. Ann Zimmerman has served as interim executive director for the past five months.

“When I was president of the Commercial Law League of America, David was our executive director, so I’ve seen his work up close,” said Mary K. Whitmer, president of the CMBA. “David is smart and energetic and his supportive management style ensures a smooth transition that will help retain and attract the best talent for our organization. In addition, the tech savvy he picked up throughout his career will prove valuable to our association and members.”

Watson was selected from a field of 88 candidates that were narrowed to 12 and then further to four by the 11-member search committee. The final four candidates participated in a day of interviews with the boards of trustees, past presidents of the association, firm managing partners, judges and the CMBA staff. Using the feedback and evaluations received during that process, the search committee’s recommendation to the two boards was unanimous.

“After a lengthy and comprehensive nationwide search, we made a great choice,” said Michael N. Ungar, president-elect of the CMBA. “David has a proven track record and he’ll bring contagious levels of energy and enthusiasm to our bar association.”

In addition to serving as executive director of the CMBA, Watson also will serve as executive director of the Bar Foundation. The CMBF, a separate 501(c)3, is the charitable arm and partner of the Association. It raises funds to support a number of public outreach activities organized under the Association’s “Justice for All” umbrella, including a variety of pro bono legal services, law-related education, tutoring and mentoring programs. This includes the 3Rs Program, where more than 500 lawyers and other volunteers teach civics and interact with more than 4,000 students in Cleveland and East Cleveland high schools.

“We were impressed with David’s commitment to community outreach,” said Richard D. Manoloff, president of the CMBF. “We expect him to do great things for the Foundation and the programs it supports.”

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Admitted to the bar in 1992, Watson is a graduate of Case Western Reserve University School of Law. He most recently was a financial advisor with Edward Jones Investments. Previously, he served five years as the executive vice president of the Commercial Law League of America (CLLA), where he was responsible for the day-to-day operation and management of the CLLA, an association with nearly 3,000 members. Additionally, Watson's background includes a wide range of management experiences including years as the deputy executive director of the Defense Research Institute (DRI); running his own solo law practice and serving as senior director with Lexis-Nexis.

"There is no doubt in my mind that our organization, the Cleveland legal and business communities and the entire Northeast Ohio civic and professional communities will benefit from his presence," said Ungar, who will become president of the CMBA in June. "I expect that he will quickly emerge as a high impact player in important areas of focus, including service to our 6000+ members and strict adherence to our continuing commitment to serving our community."

Watson said, "I am pleased to have this opportunity to work with the Cleveland legal community. This is a truly great organization and the energy, talent and expertise of our membership are exceptional. The CMBA and CMBF have made significant efforts to not only address the needs of their constituents, but to be involved in the issues that are vitally important to the Cleveland Metropolitan area. I am proud to be part of this organization and believe we can leverage a vibrant history of success to forge a very bright future."

He currently resides in Indiana with his wife Natalie and two sons.

About the CMBA

The Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association is a nonprofit organization, operating as a center for legal professionalism in the region and promoting the highest ethical and professionalism standards. The CMBA has more than 6,000 members, with Cleveland being the largest legal community in the state. Learn more at www.clemetrobar.org.

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