

Area lawyers take up challenge to keep office green

By TRAVIS ANDERSEN
 Gazette Contributing Writer

BOSTON — Four Valley attorneys and one arbitrator are among the 53 participants in the Massachusetts Bar Association Lawyers Eco-Challenge, a drive to introduce green business practices in the Bay State legal community.

“As a kid, I always thought not recycling things didn’t make any sense,” said Sean Cleary, an Amherst trial lawyer.

The bar association launched the Eco-Challenge in January. Two international firms with Boston offices joined the initiative Tuesday in commemoration of Earth Day, a worldwide celebration of environmental advocacy held each spring.

Lawyers joining the Eco-Challenge pledge to use less paper at work, turn off lights and computers when the office is empty and use more energy-efficient light bulbs, in addition to other conservation efforts. Participants range from single-lawyer practices to multinational firms.

Cleary, president-elect of the Hampshire County Bar Association, said he first heard about the challenge last fall at a meeting of county bar leaders. He said he joined the Eco-Challenge when it launched in January after running an environmentally friendly office for many years.

Cleary said he continues to recycle all paper at his office and uses a computer that shuts off automatically after idle periods. In his most sweeping change, all client records are now stored electronically.

“That was a huge amount of work, but now we use significantly less paper, so it’s environmentally friendly,” he said.

The average lawyer uses the equivalent of 24 trees’ worth of paper each year, according to a Massachusetts Bar Association press release.

Dorothy Carlo, who describes herself as a “semi-retired” attorney specializing in family and criminal law in Holyoke, said she joined the pledge as a citizen with a long-held passion for environmental causes.

“I was a biology major in college, so I’ve been a tree-hugger forever,” Carlo said. She uses her office shredder more often now to make paper “more compact”

for recycling plants. In addition, her photocopier shuts down after idling for more than two minutes.

Other Eco-Challenge signatories from western Massachusetts include Michelle Bennett, a Palmer lawyer with an accounting background; Elizabeth Clarke, a South Deerfield lawyer specializing in equestrian issues; and Mary Ellen Shea, a labor arbitrator based in Amherst.

“Ninety percent of my work involves me driving somewhere,” Shea said. She recently switched to a diesel car that runs on vegetable oil to reduce her “carbon footprint.”

Shea said the Eco-Challenge guidelines would be more applicable to larger firms. The firms joining the pledge Tuesday — Brown, Rudnick and Greenberg, Traurig — both meet that description, with more than 1,900 attorneys working in Boston and several other locations throughout the world.

The Massachusetts Bar Association has no plans to issue a full report on the progress of the Eco-Challenge since it is not an official mandate, according to a spokeswoman. Participants have the option of reporting on their own progress, which the bar will post online and in print publications for members.

More information on the program is available at <http://www.massbar.org/about-the-mba/initiatives/lawyers-eco-challenge>.

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