

# COMMONS LAW

By Bruce A. Campbell

The Columbus Bar has an attraction to South Third Street that rivals the bond between a pair of Scotty/Westy dog magnets. It has not been able to bring itself to leave this hood – at least for the last three-plus decades.

“66” was the first CBA locale on the Street in the modern era (i.e. after this Dayton boy stumbled into Klumbus). It may well be – given the Bar’s peripatetic history of in the years stretching from its contrivance in 1869 – that it was previously situate someplace(s) on Third in times forgotten.

The “66” offices were on the second floor of a bank building (still standing, but vacant). As a sapling lawyer unaccustomed to the trappings of affluence, I thought that “66” was lavishly furnished and wastefully spacious – as betokens the headquarters of a well-healed corporate entity. Lagusch and Smithberger took over the Bar’s tiller at “66” in ’77. They (and the Board that guided them) were destined to seal our affinity with this patch of pavement with two more moves up and down the street.

In the early ‘80s, movers arrived to wheel the CBA’s stuff and staff two doors north to “40,” a building generally known for its top floor occupant, the University Club. Being next to the Wolfe’s Dispatch headquarters, a short distance from the Athletic Club and the Columbus Club, with the legislature and the Supreme Court close at hand, the Columbus Bar was now entrenched in the haunts of the elites – at the very confluence of commerce and command. The more important proximity, however, was to the fine vittles upstairs at the UC.

One cloudless day, I looked from my office at “40” and saw a helicopter hovering low next to the building and turning slowly in circles as if to adsorb the views from every angle. That bit of reconnoitering, we were soon to learn, was in aid of a project to raze the very building from which we observed it. The plan was to build a high rise there to accommodate, among other things, a well-known law firm, then and still, over on Gay Street. The razing happened; the building did not. In ’91, the Columbus Bar was in Gypsy mode again.

With a bold stroke, the Association dared to venture into terra incognita. It bravely crossed over to the odd- number side of the Street and down a block and a half. Attracted by the prospect of easy access to the delights and wonders of the nascent City Center Mall and good parking in its spacious car pens, Alex led his company of pilgrims on the expedition into the wilds and planted us in “175” with the entire 11th floor as the new colony.

The initial build-out of the “175” space stuck a tone somewhere between old money and fresh ambition. A merciless slaughter of cheery trees (far more extensive than George Washington’s) was executed in aid of the woodwork and doors. A courtroom (sans court) was incorporated. The Board’s conference table was maneuvered into place after its 11-floor ride on the top of an elevator (with less than an inch to spare). Staff offices, meeting spaces, lounge areas and kitchens were nicely carpeted, furnished, spit-on and polished. Alex had the best view of the Lazarus water tower in town. Even our old neighbors the Wolfes must have been envious.

As a bonus for having endured the arduous journey to the odd side and the disorientation of unfamiliar surroundings, staff members were treated to the ever-fascinating construction process as the Center took shape. It is after all, more fun to watch work than do it. Of course, many a staff paycheck would soon be vacuumed into the mall peddler’s coffers.

Eventually, the City Center suffered its drawn-out, inglorious winding down leading to its demise and destruction. On the compensatory side, however, the tearing-down process was even more exciting to watch than the building-up had been, and there was much less competition for parking spaces.

At lease re-up time in 2005, a tenant improvement allowance allowed the Bar to resparkle and reconfigure Suite 1100. The courtroom shrank and other meeting rooms expanded. Accounting got much-needed extra space. AV and other technology underwent improvement. Carpet and décor changes occurred. Alex was in his office; all was right with the CBA world.

Despite initial misgivings of some, the Columbus Commons transformed the Bar’s back yard into a showplace in every sense of the word. It draws hoards of folks daily with gardens to enrich them, amusements and music to cheer them and flocks of food trucks to feed ‘em. What other bar association has an outdoor patio like that?

As with the “s” stuff, Change Happens. Bar associations are not immune to the inexorable urge to rejigger. In 2012, with a new and very-much-in-house landlord, Danno Tiano, taking over, the earth under and around “175” began to shift and shake. Danny, a gregarious and affable Greek, bought the building with a view to making it his showplace, not just another building. He renamed it, fittingly, “175 on the Commons.” He set about to fill it (even in a down market) with long-term tenants, and so has he done. As enticement to the CBA to extend its lease, Danny offered an extremely generous improvement allotment and favorable terms. The Bar leadership –after due diligence in examining other options with the guidance of a broker –concluded that a ten-year lease extension was in the organization’s best interest. So, here we are on South Third Street for yet another decade.

This time, staff did not have to look out the windows to find diversion; the demo and construction happened – more or less simultaneously – right under, over and around us. At this writing, the work is shaping to the point we can envision the final product and begin to believe that it will all come together somewhere near the “target date” (which anyone ever involved in construction will understand to be a fluid, if not vaporous, concept). Danny’s talented and dedicated tradespeople are working harder than a Mississippi River sandbagging crew with flood waters rising.

Not wanting to buzz-kill the end of this tale, I will just say that we think our members will cotton to the newness, flexibility and general aura of your spruced-up “Friendly Neighborhood Bar” – here, as ever, on South Third Street.



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