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New Defense Bar President to Focus on Image and Growth

- The Georgia Defense Lawyers Association has a new president with a mission to define the group's image.

"I plan to focus on expanding the visibility of the GDLA by actively dispelling the perception that we're just the insurance defense bar," said Matthew Moffett, a partner at Gray, Rust, St. Amand, Moffett & Brieske in Atlanta. "We're the voice of the entire civil defense bar."

The GDLA, which has more than 800 members, elected Moffett to the one-year term earlier this month at its annual meeting in Palm Coast, Fla.

Moffett said GDLA is working to increase membership. One strategy is courting young lawyers with programs that offer education on trial and mediation skills, court and civil procedure rules, and judges.

Moffett also hopes to dispel any confusion about what kind of defense practices come under GDLA's umbrella: personal injury, commercial law, labor and employment, products liability, construction and government.

"Another misconception is that we're the criminal bar," he said. "We believe a concentrated effort to reach anyone defending businesses or individuals in civil cases will correct that."



GDLA President, Matt Moffett

Another goal is to open lines of communication with its adversaries in the Georgia Trial Lawyers Association. Moffett, son of a plaintiffs lawyer, said both groups fight for justice.

"I have great respect for lawyers like [GTLA president] Darren Penn and my friends in GTLA," he said. "Yes, we are adversaries, but only professionally, and I look forward to some joint event

over the next year, perhaps at a less formal bar than the one we pass in court."

Other GDLA officers elected this term include president-elect Peter Muller of Goodman McGuffey Lindsey & Johnson; secretary Hall McKinley III of Drew Eckl & Farnham; and treasurer Sally Akins of Ellis Painter Ratterree & Adams.

—Kathleen Baydala Joyner