

## **Why Does NCBJ Have a NextGen Program And How Did It Start?**

Each year the National Conference of Bankruptcy Judges selects upwards of 50 up-and-coming bankruptcy attorneys with three to ten years of experience, “who show the potential to distinguish themselves in the future years as highly respected members of the bankruptcy bar,” to participate in their Next Generation (NextGen) Program. These ‘rising stars’ have already “demonstrated commitment to the highest standards of civility, ethics, and professionalism.” Nominations for the program typically takes place in May and young bankruptcy attorneys are encouraged to apply. The NextGen program was imagined by Judge Judith K. Fitzgerald (W.D. Pa., Ret.) in 2011 to encourage younger attorneys to attend the Annual Conference of NCBJ, bring new and fresh ideas and to become leaders of the bankruptcy bench and bar. Since its inception, five NextGen alumni are now on the bankruptcy bench. They are Sage Sigler (N.D. Ga.), Karen Owens (D. Del.), Whitman Holt (W.D. Wash.), Bess Creswell (M.D. Ala.) and Jason Burgess (M.D. Fla.). There are over 500 NextGen Alums with approximately 400 NextGen Alums active on the NextGen LinkedIn Group.

*“NextGen is the sole nationwide program that allows young bankruptcy practitioners to interact with the bankruptcy judiciary in a small group that builds a lasting relationship between participants in the program and the NCBJ.” Eyal Berger, NextGen Alum, Class of 2012.*

Judith Fitzgerald also gives credit to Past NCBJ President Randy Dunn, who “took a chance when [she] asked him to introduce NextGen at his conference to see whether we could make it a success.” She went on to say, “Randy loved the idea and let me use a committee of both judges and lawyers (which, if my recollection is correct, was only done for the education program and the journal at the time), and which I thought was absolutely essential if we were to design programs to appeal to the senior partners who would send their associates at their firm's expense.” Judith also credits the support of each NCBJ president and board for making the program stronger year after year. “And the fact that NextGenners take the new class under their wing is remarkable!”

*“NCBJ can be an intimidating conference for young lawyers, but NextGen helped me feel at home at NCBJ and within the nationwide bankruptcy bar. I made professional connections and formed friendships that have lasted over a decade, and it has been a joy to see the amazing things my fellow NextGen alumni have done in their careers.” Judge Sage Sigler (N.D. Ga.), NextGen Alum, Class of 2013.*

NextGen originally started with a two-hour program where participants met twenty bankruptcy judges, now, in its current form, the selected participants will be able to interface directly with over 20 bankruptcy judges on a variety of topics including oral advocacy, written advocacy, and best practices. They will also have access to exclusive NextGen events including:

- A judicial roundtable event featuring bankruptcy judges from across the nation.
- A small-group lunch with experienced bankruptcy practitioners.
- A networking reception and dinner to build contacts and relationships with NextGen alumni.
- A social outing to discover the city hosting the Annual NCBJ meeting.
- Future opportunities to participate as panelists with judges and other practitioners in educational offerings during the NCBJ Annual Meetings.

Each nomination must include a completed nomination form and a cover letter from an authorized partner of the law firm, senior attorney of a governmental agency, or bankruptcy judge, attesting to the qualifications of the nominee to be a Next Generation Program participant. Lawyers in firms with five or fewer attorneys may self-nominate but must fulfill the eligibility requirements. Each participant of the program must fulfill all the nomination qualifications:

- Three to ten years of experience practicing law (including clerkships).
- Devote at least fifty percent of their practice to bankruptcy cases.
- Demonstrate legal excellence in the practice of bankruptcy law.
- Display a serious commitment to principles of civility, ethics, and professionalism.
- Demonstrate commitment to the continued educational development of bankruptcy professionals and to the professional activities that will benefit the public, members of the bar and the court system.

The cost of each selected participant's attendance at the Annual Meeting must be borne by the participant or their employer, but no additional cost will be incurred to attend the Next Generation lunch, Judges' roundtable, or NextGen reunion reception. There may be extra cost for optional events, including the alumni dinner and social outing. It is anticipated, consistent with prior years, NCBJ registration fee waivers, as well as scholarships to defray part of the cost (up to 50% eligible expenses, not to exceed \$1,500.00), will be available to the first five eligible applicants. To qualify for a scholarship and a fee waiver, an applicant must earn less than \$85,000.00 gross income per year. To be considered for those subsidies, a request attesting to the nominee's qualifications for scholarship must accompany the nomination.

For the DEI Committee, Kathy A. Surratt-States (E.D. Mo.) and Deborah L. Thorne (N.D. Ill.)