



## State Bar Celebrates 35th Legal Milestone

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 9, 2010

**Tony Smith** was a featured speaker at the dedication ceremony for the State Bar of Michigan's 35th Legal Milestone "Elk, Oil and the Environment". The ceremony memorialized the decade-long battle in the 1970s over drilling for oil and gas in northeast Michigan's Pigeon River Country Forest. Tony represented Shell Oil Company in that matter.

The dedication ceremony was held at noon on **Wednesday, June 9** at Treetops Resort Wilderness Cabin just east of Gaylord. The bronze plaque is permanently installed outside the Otsego County Courthouse located at 225 W. Main St. in Gaylord.

The 91,000-acre forest—home to a substantial elk herd and sitting on huge reserves of oil and natural gas—was the scene of one of the longest, most controversial environmental battles in Michigan history. Oil companies and environmental groups engaged in a series of lawsuits, consent orders, legislation, and compromises.

A 1979 landmark Michigan Supreme Court case (*West Michigan Environmental Action Council, Inc. v. Natural Resources Commission*) eventually led to an extraordinary agreement between state government, the oil industry, and environmental groups. It allowed tightly regulated drilling in the southern one-third of the forest, which decades later has yielded valuable gas and oil reserves while the elk herd has continued to grow.

"The Pigeon River dispute and ultimate resolution is just as relevant today as it was 30 years ago," said State Bar President Charles Toy, who will share master of ceremony duties with State Bar Executive Director Janet Welch. "It not only set standards for oil drilling in Michigan, but it became a national and international model for resource management."

The State Bar's Michigan Legal Milestone program was developed in 1986 to authenticate and recognize historical landmarks in Michigan's legal history. The program is overseen by the Bar's Michigan Legal

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#### ATTORNEYS

Charles E. Barbieri

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#### PRACTICE AREAS

Environmental Law

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#### INDUSTRIES

Agricultural Services

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Milestones Subcommittee, chaired by Michael Ellis, which is part of the Bar's Law-Related Education and Public Outreach Committee, chaired by Jeffrey Paulsen.