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Local legal minds discuss changes to sports law

By DARRELL JACKSON, Staff Writer

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Phoenix Suns and Mercury General Counsel Melissa Goldenberg addresses the crowd about her duties with the team.

Photo by Darrell Jackson

Nearly 20 legal experts from around the world attended Barristers and Baseball: Sports Law Presentation March 10 at Peoria Sports Complex.

The event presented an update on sports legal issues and had three speakers make presentations about ethical compliance, labor and employment issues, regulatory compliance and overseeing and advising tort, sports gambling and fantasy sports, the future of college sports, sports licensing issues and contract liability issues.

“This is a continuing legal education, so our primary audience is lawyers, but there are judges and law clerks here as well,” said event organizer, attorney Debbie Weecks. “We are doing this so they can share knowledge in a fun and meaningful way, to share information from the sports arena, to anything they may have questions for our speakers.”

The featured speakers, Melissa Goldenberg, general counsel for the Phoenix Suns and Mercury; Gabriel Adam Feldman, director of Tulane Sports Law Program; and Peoria Judge George T. Anagnost, discussed numerous issues within the sports world.

“We sell happiness, and as a lawyer, that is not an easy job,” Goldenberg said. “Sometimes we have to take a step back and realize that we are working for that.”

Goldenberg joined the organization in June 2014, after spending more than 10 years in the private sector, working for Western Alliance Bancorporation, a publicly-traded bank holding company based in Phoenix.

“When I came to the organization, I realized I had to be a jack of all trades,” Goldenberg said. “I learned I have to be a master of none, because you may have to respond to anything that comes up.”

One question asked was about the Suns and their current home, Talking Stick Arena, and if the team was serious about possible relocation.

“The lease on the arena is a 40 year lease, but after 30 years if the arena is obsolete, we can begin looking for alternatives,” Goldenberg said. “Our arena is the fourth oldest in the NBA, so preliminary discussions have begun, but it is way too early in the process.”

She added that they have been forced to turn down concerts at Talking Stick Arena because they could not handle the technical aspects of certain tours.

“We need to work with the city and get what is best for both the city and the team,” Goldenberg said.

Anagnost, who has served on various limited court rules committees, was appointed as Peoria’s first full-time judge by the Peoria City Council in 1994.

“The reason for this is to learn any new issues and for us to answer any questions you may have,” Anagnost said addressing the crowd.

Attendees asked questions ranging from sports law, drug issues, arena management and other issues that are currently ranging in the sports world.

Weecks said all the people attending were required to attend continuing education each year and this would count toward that, plus they were all allowed to watch a spring training baseball game after the conference.

“This is going to be a variety of sports, business and entertainment law matters with more advanced issues that they can get more information for their informal continuing education,” said Weecks. “Attorneys are required to have 15 hours of continuing education each year and this will count as three and a half of those for them.”