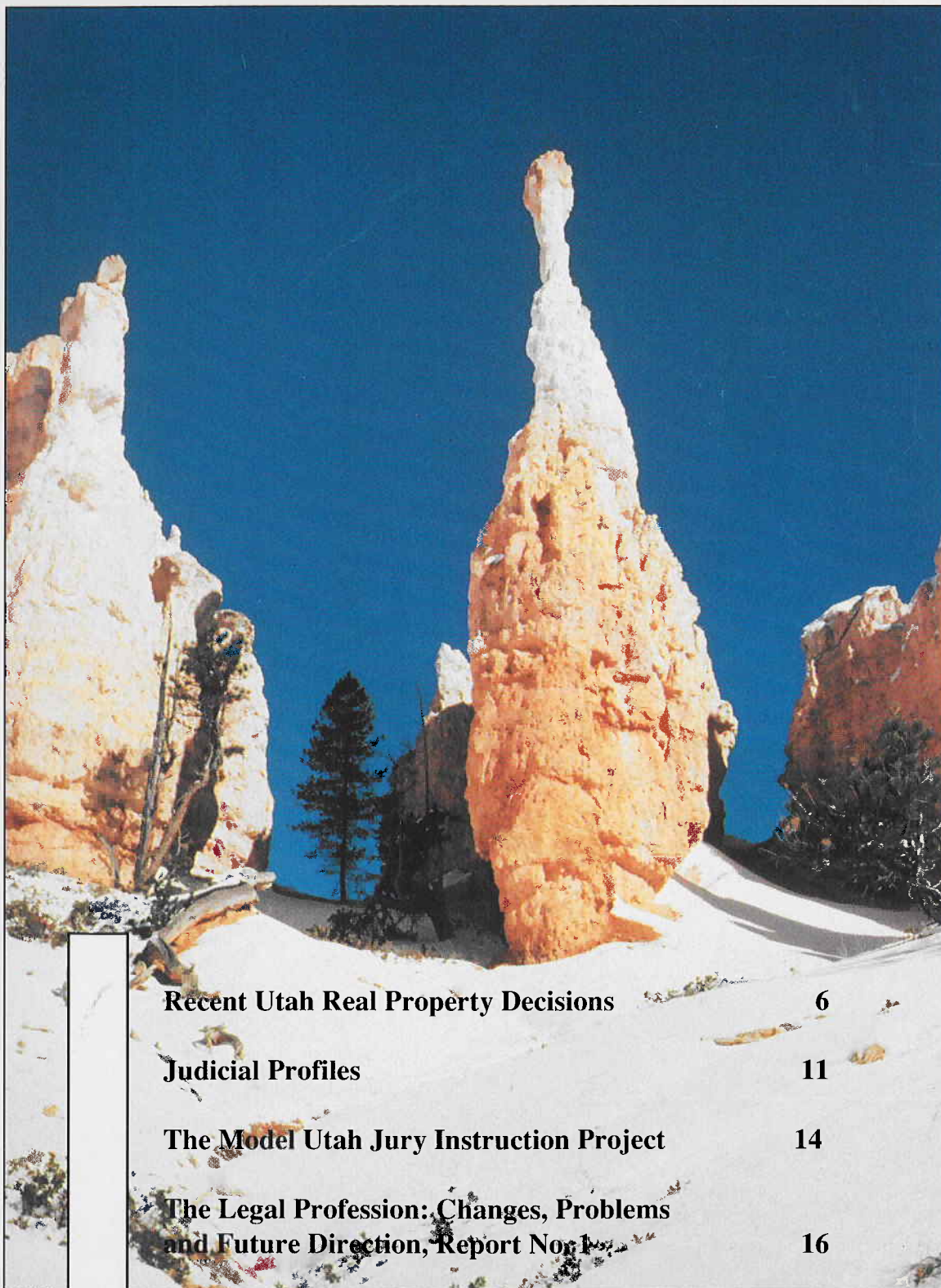


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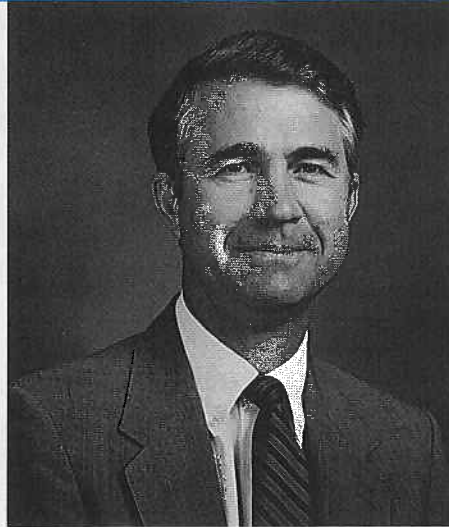
COVER: Bryce Canyon in Winter, by Brian D. Kelm, Esq. of Salt Lake City.

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The *Utah Bar Journal* is published monthly, except July and August, by the Utah State Bar. One copy of each issue is furnished to members as part of their State Bar dues. Subscription price to others, \$25; single copies, \$2.50; second-class postage paid at Salt Lake City, Utah. For information on advertising rates and space reservation, call or write Utah State Bar offices.

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Some Employee's Views of Lawyers

By Gayle F. McKeachnie

Recently, I have been thinking about lawyer and lawyer staff productivity. Most lawyers, whether they work in a solo practice, law firm, government, or business environment, work in concert with other people, both lawyers and non-lawyers.

Most of us have the opportunity to deal with people who always seem to meet deadlines and lead a calm organized life with time for family, civic associations and play. Likewise, we can each probably think of a lawyer who is always late, works nights and weekends to catch up, is stressed out and suffering ill health due in part to the pressures of lawyering.

Recent surveys have indicated a high degree of dissatisfaction among practicing lawyers largely due to long and hard hours coupled with the stressful nature of law. These same pressures exist for the non-legal staff working with attorneys.

A law office is a natural repository for stress. Competition created by an increased lawyer population, rising costs, decreasing profits, and more demanding and sophisticated clients all contribute. The lawyer often has had no training running a business. Even where there is an administrator or an office manager, the needs and desires of several—sometimes many owners rather than one creates a dilemma and tension. Each lawyer is probably an individualist by nature who be-

lieves his or her own way of doing things, even in administration areas, is better than anyone else's. The adversarial nature of the practice where the attorney either wins or loses and is constantly faced with the fear of failure and public humiliation, adds stress.

A law office is the home of much human misery such as divorce, physical injury, loss of a loved one, a business person trying to survive in a complex world. The lawyer finds himself or herself with responsibility for people in these situations. In addition to the many pressures outside the control of the lawyer, some of the greatest stress caused in a law practice may result from the behavior and work habits of the lawyers.

I was recently told by an experienced legal secretary about the stress and pressure existing because of the work habits and behavior of one of the two lawyers for whom she works. I venture to guess that the lawyer has little inclination of the \$10,000 to \$20,000 cost he or his firm will incur in training a new secretary when this lady leaves because of lawyer created stress. Law firms are plagued with high and costly turnover.

Considerate lawyers who manage their time and tempers usually have loyal and productive employees. The disorganized, ill tempered employer has costly and high turnover with lower productivity.

Listed below are four of the most commonly voiced areas of frustration among people working with lawyers.

I. Poor Manager of Time

Many lawyers do a poor job of organizing themselves to utilize their time. This results in raising the levels of tension already existing in a law office. The concepts involved in the study of time management, if applied to the running of a law office, have a beneficial impact, not only on the general feelings in the office but also on the pocketbook of the lawyer.

II. Procrastination

Most legal secretaries or legal assistants report that the biggest reason work is not getting done on time is the lawyer's procrastination. A lawyer's work habits and disorganization can have an extremely negative impact on support staff as well as other attorneys. It means someone has to work late, often requiring special arrangements with family and cancellation of personal plans. It means extra expense for the firm. Look around your work place. I have been amazed at the signs hung on office walls joking about this problem. Lawyers generally do not even realize that they are creating such an impact on the good will of the staff until people move on to work some place else seeking a less stressful environment.

III. Perfectionism

The perfectionist may be worse than

