

## Evan Goes to Olympia

by Evan Loeffler

I was recently called to service by the Washington Young Lawyers Division. The WYLD made a donation to the YMCA to help fund their annual mock trial competition. At the end of the youth legislation session there was a ceremony attended by Washington Governors, past and present, and other luminaries including several Supreme Court Justices, State Senators, and a Nobel Prize winner. Having helped make the program possible, someone from the WYLD needed to attend. This did not concern me until Kathleen Hopkins, our fearless president-elect, contacted me with the news that she would not be able to attend. She asked me to take her place.

"This is a great opportunity, Evan," she said. "You're new to the area, so you'll meet lots of new people."

"But I had made plans to vacuum the rug that night," I protested.

"You'll get a chance to meet the Governor," she persisted."

"But Olympia is so far from here," I pointed out, demonstrating my keen sense of geography. "I'll probably get lost and end up in Canada."

"Go or you're fired," Kathleen suggested, bringing to light one of the disadvantages of being a hireling of the WYLD instead of an elected official.

"I think I'll be in the area anyway," I retreated somewhat gracefully. So I went.

It is true that I recently moved to Seattle from Spokane. I took a position at a small firm because I found that being a solo practitioner involved spending 14 to 16 hours a day, and entire weekends, in the office. I had not seen the sun since last August, and my social life—always a tenuous concept to begin with—had dwindled. The opportunity to meet people in my new home was both intriguing and exciting.

The party itself was an impressive affair held in the Capitol Building. I did not know anyone, so I placed myself strategically within arm's reach of the *hors d'oeuvres*, where people had the choice of speaking to me or leaving all the food for me. This plan was somewhat successful: several people asked me to quit hogging all the stuffed shrimp.

Later, I noticed that Governor Locke was holding court at the end of the room. I joined the line of people waiting to speak to him and tried to think of something witty to say. I knew that, true to his job description, the governor would "work" the room. This is a survival tool politicians use: if there are 120 people waiting to speak to a politician, he or she will allocate an average of 30 seconds to greet each person. By working the room effectively a politician can generate enough political donations to pay the caterers and still have time to partake of the snacks.

With such a limited amount of time, I knew I would have to be particularly witty to leave a lasting impression. When my time came, I was at my best: I shook his hand firmly, looked him straight in the eye and spoke clearly.

"Governor Locke, it's a pleasure to meet you. I'm with the Young Lawyers Division of the Washington State Bar Association."

"Your nameplate is upside-down," he replied, looking at the sticker on my lapel.

"Duh-uh," I rejoined, having temporarily forgotten the English language.

"Nice meeting you," the Governor said cheerily as he moved on, a scant 21 seconds into our meeting.

Somewhat disheartened, I attempted to return to the *hors d'oeuvres*, when I bumped into the podium the Governor stands behind when delivering his weekly addresses on television. The Great Seal of Washington fell off the podium and broke.

Several people turned to stare. I reacted calmly and with aplomb:

"Oh @#%&! Did I do that?"

Justice Utter approached and clapped me on the back.

"Don't worry about it, Son," he smiled. "It's just the Great Seal of Washington!"

"Do they have a spare?" I asked.

If they did, I didn't see it. I was asked for my name and address so they would know where to send the bill. By this time I had regained my composure, so I told them my name was Tim Szambelan.

It is said that the party doesn't really begin until somebody breaks something. I learned that this is true somewhat, in that it did give me something to talk about for the rest of the evening.

"So, you're the young man who broke the Great Seal in the Governor's office?"

"That would be me, yes."

"I see that now you're taking all the Swedish meatballs."

"They ran out of stuffed shrimp."

All things considered, I felt the evening was a positive experience. My primary mission of being a visible attendee from the WYLD was certainly achieved, and Governor Locke will probably think of me every week as he stands behind his denuded podium. There were some shaking heads and rolling eyes when I made my report to the WYLD Board of Trustees, but I was still able to convince them that the cost of repairing the Great Seal (\$12.95 for some epoxy and a spray can of gold paint) should not be charged to the *De Novo* budget.

While my career as goodwill ambassador for the WYLD may be over, I did learn two important things from the experience: first, attempting to make a decent meal out of *hors d'oeuvres* is not socially acceptable in certain circles; second, the Great Seal of Washington is made out of Plaster of Paris and covered in cheap gold paint.