

# Think fast: Improv helps improve skills

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MUCH LIKE improvisational actors, lawyers must think quickly and play fast in order to stay in the game.

Balch & Bingham partner Matthew B. Ames had this in mind when he and other members of Dad's Garage Theatre Co. in Inman Park decided to offer an attorney improv class.

After a previous class sold out in February, the theater scheduled a second one for Sunday, from 1 to 4 p.m. Prospective students can register for the \$50 workshop at [www.dadsgarage.com](http://www.dadsgarage.com) by clicking on the "Tickets" link at the top of the Web page.

"We actually came up with the attorney workshop after reading an article in the *Daily Report* several months ago about attorneys

in [Washington] D.C. playing with improv,"

said Ames, who has served as the theater's board president since last August. "Dad's has a national reputation for its outstanding improv, so we thought, 'Why not us?'"



Matthew B. Ames

Ames was one of 16 people who registered for the first workshop.

"The event itself was a home run," he said. "It sold out, and the feedback was all very positive."

Former DeKalb District Attorney J. Tom Morgan was among those in attendance. "Even though I've had a lot of experience in court, [the class] made me speak quickly and coherently. That is what trial lawyers do,"



J. Tom Morgan

director at Dad's Garage.

"In life, and on the stage, we usually only get one chance to say what we mean," Nash said. "So it's important to say it with confidence the first time."

Nash trains students to speak in a concise and specific manner without missing a beat. "A lot of trial work is being able to speak off the cuff," said Morgan, a sole practitioner in Decatur. "Improv gives you the tools and

Morgan said. "Too often I hear trial lawyers ramble because they don't know what to say."

Among the fundamental disciplines of improv is thinking on one's feet, said improviser Amber Nash, who serves as the education

confidence to do exactly that—to go in without a prepared script."

The class also builds confidence, Morgan said. "People say 90 percent of trial work is preparation, but the other 10 percent is confidence in your ability to do it," he said.

Both Morgan and Ames said the class was ideal for attorneys who don't get the chance to be in the courtroom as much as they like.

"At [Balch & Bingham], we always encourage our younger lawyers to take advantage of every opportunity they can to be on their feet when talking to other people," Ames said. "A lot of skills that the workshop emphasizes—and practicing good listening skills, in particular—easily translate to the practice of law. And, every lawyer could benefit from the challenge of having to 'present' in an unfamiliar setting because things in life—or in court—don't always go as planned." ☞

## Postponing access to public defenders unfairly hurts indigents

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Defendants with financial resources often seek out a lawyer within hours of arrest; indigent defendants do not have that option but have traditionally had access to counsel within 72 hours of arrest.

in the past few years where defendants were "lost" in the system; without a lawyer to speak up for them they were left in a no-man's land in the court system—not on a court calendar and not able to get out of jail.

There are already so many ways in which defendants without funds are at a disadvantage compared to those of financial means. There is simply no compelling reason to further extend the period of time that poor defendants must wait before being appointed

family and many friends of Atlanta lawyer Homer A. Houchins Jr. on his untimely death March 25.

During his 45 years of practice, Mr. Houchins was not only engaged in international business law, he was very active in international affairs, as a founder and president of the local French-American Chamber of Commerce, honorary consul of France for the southeastern U.S. and as attorney of confidence to Germany. His work in build-



Homer A. Houchins Jr.

A strong judicial system is the foundation on which the principles of liberty and justice stand, and we must work to protect it every day. Through his lifetime of service, Homer Houchins provided a shining tribute to the system that protects the rights and liberties