

President's Message

That's a Wrap

By President E. Jane Sherman

As this last President's Message is being submitted, 2016 has just ended and the wrappings and trimmings of the holidays are being put away. Just around the corner, the Louisiana Bar Foundation's (LBF) governance year will be wrapping up in April. This 2016-17 year has seen a rallying of support on all levels as our communities faced difficult times brought on by disastrous flooding and its aftermath — 26 of our 64 parishes flooding in March, followed by more than 2 trillion gallons of water flooding a third of our southern parishes in August. The outpouring of support has allowed us to come a long way with new initiatives. It has truly been a pleasure and honor to serve as President and witness the wrappings of service from all areas that have moved us forward with civil legal aid giving comfort and care to the compromised. Those in darkness are seeing light as they find strength through the struggle.

Let's talk about the light brought about by new initiatives this year. On the funding side, in 2016, the LBF initiated the **Louisiana Flood Recovery Fund** and received donations in-state and from sister New York Bar and Alabama Law Foundations. More than \$200,000 was awarded to the legal service corporations and pro bono organizations for post-disaster civil legal services such as title clearing, FEMA eligibility and insurance issues. The **Unidentified Funds** 2016 amendment to the Louisiana Rules of Professional Conduct enabled lawyers to direct nearly \$200,000 in unidentified Interest on Lawyers' Trust Account (IOLTA) funds to the LBF to support legal aid. Most impactful, the U.S. Department of Justice's **Bank of America Class Action Settlement** awarded just over \$6.5 million to the LBF to help families stay in their homes and out of foreclosure

and bankruptcy and to provide a continuum of sustained grants over a period of years.

On the technology side, the LBF provided \$125,000 for a **Statewide Hotline** administered by the Louisiana Civil Justice Center to provide brief statewide intake advice and referrals to the legal service organizations. A new **Self-Represented Litigants** funding category was created to fund innovative access to justice solutions such as self-help centers and kiosks in each parish using court-approved forms and pro bono lawyers in the district courthouses to assist with client advice.

To increase awareness of civil legal aid, the LBF funded the 2016 **Economic Impact Study (EIS)** assessing the value of civil legal aid on the economic, social and health conditions of our state. The expansive study revealed that for every \$1 invested in Louisiana legal aid, Louisiana receives almost \$9 of immediate and long-term financial benefits. The EIS is a request of House Resolution No. 2 of the 2016 Regular Session of the Louisiana Legislature and a project of LBF's partnership with the newly formed **Access to Justice Commission**. Discussions are underway to request restored state funding of civil legal aid. The LBF and the Access to Justice Commission hosted a **Voices for Civil Justice Strategic Communications Training** session designed to provide tools for consistent messaging within our civil legal aid network.

For advocacy service, the LBF extended funds to **Louisiana Appleseed** to develop policy solutions to legal injustices and to increase legal services



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proactively, rather than by piecemeal relief, to the poor. In November, a **Kids' Chance Proclamation** by Gov. John Bel Edwards was signed and celebrated declaring Nov. 14-18, 2016, as the first "Louisiana Kids' Chance Awareness Week." The Louisiana workers' compensation and legal communities came together and raised more than \$4,000 for scholarships.

For training, the LBF held a **Board Training** session led by the national Legal Services Corp. and local experts to strengthen our grantees' board leadership by reviewing board member responsibilities, administrative duties and mission goals. Additionally, nine new **Oral Histories** were recorded featuring retired judges and bar leaders for education and historical preservation usage. Interviews can be viewed at: www.raisingthebar.org.

Other changes this year included the recent award by the national Legal Services Corp. to Acadiana Legal Service Corp. of **La. Service Area 11**, formerly served by Legal Services of North Louisiana, Inc. Like most changes or renovations in life, they can inspire excitement or anguish. In this instance, all parties are together moving forward to ensure continued quality service for those in need.

It has been a long, difficult year for many Louisiana residents, but a much too short one for me as President. As the communities heal from the tragedies endured, I have seen that the character of our legal service providers, as a collective, is a passionate sense of mission. They do not simply want a job, but sincerely want to take action to positively impact each individual client they serve. Each day, rain or shine, there are those who rely upon the LBF to overcome basic life-changing crises. Become a Fellow of the LBF and wrap your support around those in need. We change lives because of you!