

President's Message

Interview of 2014-15 President Hon. C. Wendell Manning:

Interviewed by 2014-15 Secretary Valerie Briggs Bargas

Bargas: Tell us about yourself and your family.

Manning: I'm from Oak Grove, a small town in northeast Louisiana, and a graduate of Oak Grove High School. I received my undergraduate degree and MBA from Louisiana Tech and my law degree from Louisiana State University. I have been married for 20 years to my wife, Ashley. We have three children: Margaret, a freshman at LSU; Jefferson, a junior at St. Frederick Catholic High School; and Rosemary, a fourth grader at Jesus the Good Shepherd School. Our family lives on a farm outside Monroe where we raise Black Angus cattle, among other animals.

Since 2003, I've served as state district judge on the 4th Judicial District Court for Ouachita and Morehouse parishes. Prior to being elected judge, I practiced law for 15 years and was a partner in the firm Theus, Grisham, Davis & Leigh, L.L.P., primarily engaged in insurance defense, construction and commercial litigation.

In addition to my work with the Louisiana Bar Foundation, I've served in various capacities with the Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA) (Young Lawyers Section and Board of Governors), the Louisiana District Judges' Association, the Louisiana Center for Law and Civic Education, Access to Justice, various Supreme Court committees, and organizations within the local community.

Bargas: How did you get involved with the Louisiana Bar Foundation (LBF)?

Manning: While serving as state chair of the Young Lawyers Section, I was approached by Cyrus Greco, one of the Bar Foundation's "founding fathers," about becoming a Fellow. Quickly, I became very supportive of the LBF's mission and active on a number of committees, including the Community Action, Grants and Classroom

to Courtroom committees. I served on the board of directors for a number of years before being selected to serve as treasurer, then as secretary of the LBF.



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Bargas: What role does the LBF play in promoting access to the justice system?

Manning: The LBF serves a direct role in access to justice through its financial support of a network of non-profit organizations providing critical, civil legal aid services to Louisiana's indigent population. LBF's financial support is vital to ensure that access to the justice system is a reality — not just for those who can afford it — but for all citizens in Louisiana. The LBF has granted more than \$54.4 million in financial support to the legal aid network in the past 25 years.

Bargas: Can you tell us about the LBF's new initiative: Louisiana Campaign to Preserve Civil Legal Aid?

Manning: The LBF has united with the LSBA and other key stakeholders to launch the Louisiana Campaign to Preserve Civil Legal Aid for the purpose of raising funds for civil legal aid providers and increasing awareness of the growing civil legal needs of our citizens. The campaign is modeled after similar statewide campaigns in Washington, Oregon, California and Texas. These states' campaigns are making a big impact in supporting the services provided by their legal aid networks.

Bargas: Why is this Campaign so important?

Manning: Nearly 20 percent of Louisiana's citizens live in poverty, ranking

our state among the highest in the nation. We must recognize that civil legal aid is an essential component of efforts to improve economic and social conditions for low-income people and their communities. Sometimes legal aid is the only thing standing between a family's ability to be self-sufficient and poverty. For many Louisiana citizens facing crisis, an effective and powerful response must include civil legal aid. The assistance that civil legal aid provides in helping individuals and families resolve problems also benefits our businesses, schools and other social institutions. We know that increased funding for civil legal aid will have a ripple effect, impacting not only individuals and families served but the community at large.

Bargas: Are you satisfied by the response of Louisiana attorneys to the call to perform pro bono work?

Manning: The most important work we do as lawyers is to help people resolve problems. Through this work, we serve the greater society in the interest of justice. Equal access to justice and fairness are fundamental to the work we do. The members of the Louisiana Bar have a long tradition of service and are among the most generous professionals in giving of their time, talent and financial support to professional and community causes. I commend the many lawyers and firms who are making significant contributions to public legal services and pro bono efforts across the state, often without recognition. However, there is a lot of work to be done to ensure that our system of justice is equally accessible to all citizens. Therefore, along with the LSBA and the state's judiciary, we will continue to encourage lawyers to engage in pro bono work.

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