

## President's Message

# Q&A with 2018-19 LBF President W. Michael Street

*Interviewed by 2018-19 Secretary Harry J. (Skip) Philips, Jr.*

**Philips:** Tell us about yourself and your family.

**Street:** My wife, Jennifer, and I have been married for 25 years. For the last decade or so, we have celebrated our April anniversary during the Bar Foundation



W. Michael Street

Gala weekend. Jennifer is so supportive of everything I do. She has more confidence in me than I have in myself sometimes. We have three children, Harper, Catherine and Emma. Harper is finishing his third year as an undergraduate at Louisiana State University and aspires to be an attorney. Catherine will be graduating in May from Neville High School in Monroe. At this moment, she is wrestling with her college decision. Top contenders are the University of Arkansas (a potential house divided) or Rhode College in Memphis, with LSU and Tulane as dark-horse contenders. Emma is a freshman at Neville High School and, as I write this, she is trying out for JV cheer. While a talented cheerleader, Emma is at heart a dancer. Her current claim to fame is playing Annie in last year's Christmas ballet. When Emma comes home for a break between dance classes . . . she dances.

**Philips:** How did you get involved with the Louisiana Bar Foundation?

**Street:** Like so many others, my introduction to the Louisiana Bar Foundation (LBF) was an invitation to serve on a Community Partnership Panel. At the time, I had been involved in the 4th Judicial District Bar Association, our local Inn of Court and the Louisiana State Bar Association's (LSBA) Young Lawyer Section. After a time, I had the opportunity to serve as the chair of the Northeast Community Partnership Panel. During that time, I also served on the LBF's Grants Committee. It was exciting to experience

the expansion from the microcosm of the Community Partnership Panel's work to the macrocosm of the work of LBF. I realize more than ever the importance of the focus of the community partnership panels and the value of the insight they offer.

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

**Street:** As the administrator of the Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA) funds, the LBF plays a significant role in promoting access to justice. The LBF works with direct providers of services to at-risk populations throughout Louisiana to maximize the impact of limited resources. In addition to funding opportunities, the LBF has valuable experience in areas of grant management and oversight. The LBF routinely shares the benefit of its experience by providing training for boards of partner organizations to help them better serve their target populations.

**Philips:** Tell us about the Access to Justice Commission and its role in the LBF's mission.

**Street:** The ATJ Commission offers significant opportunities for direct service providers to coordinate services, avoid redundancies and maximize benefits in a time when available resources are at significant risk for reduction. The LBF looks forward to a long partnership with the talented and dedicated leadership of the ATJ Commission. Together, we will endeavor to create a stable platform for direct service providers.

**Philips:** Why is it so important to have consistent funding for civil legal aid?

**Street:** Consistent funding for civil legal aid is essential for predictability. It is necessary so that direct service providers are able to plan for the future with staffing projections and service area maintenance and expansion. It is necessary so that those who rely on services provided by civil legal aid

agencies can know that, when assistance is needed, it will be available. For those who need civil legal aid, the added pressure of whether services will or will not be available in the next six months — when homes, children or personal safety are at risk — is unacceptable.

**Philips:** How can Louisiana lawyers help the LBF?

**Street:** Join the LBF. Lawyers are required to be members of the LSBA and to have an IOLTA account. They are not required to be members of the LBF. But, making the decision to join the LBF demonstrates a commitment to providing access to justice for all. It is easy to be drawn into the day-to-day drudgery of the practice of law. But for most of us, the decision to practice law was inspired by an appreciation for the importance of the rule of law, of high ideals, of justice. Membership in the LBF is a way to continue those aspirations and promote the ideal that all of us, no matter our place in society, are worthy of dignity. The impact of your joining, not only the financial contribution, but the statement your commitment to justice sends to our elected officials, to those at risk and to society at large, is huge.

**Philips:** What are your goals and your vision as LBF president?

**Street:** Throughout my career, I have been fortunate to work with incredibly talented attorneys around the state through the LSBA and the LBF. There are needs across the state demanding our attention. I hope to strengthen our partnership with the access to justice community and direct service providers. I hope that as an attorney from northeast Louisiana working to support the mission of LBF and its valuable partners that I might encourage other attorneys throughout the state to appreciate the roles they play, to continue to be strong voices in the direction of our associations, and to participate in the good work of making our state a better place for everyone.