

President’s Message

Proud of the LBF’s Contributions to Our Legal System and State in Challenging Year

By Christopher K. Ralston, 2021-22 President

For many Louisianians, 2021 was a difficult year. People faced both personal and professional challenges due to Hurricane Ida and the pandemic. We know that, during and after a disaster, civil legal aid needs dramatically increase. Homeowners need help with successions and title clearing to access federal recovery dollars. Missed rent payments can lead to an increase in evictions and proceedings. Domestic violence centers are impacted by an increase in residents. At the same time, vulnerable children need protection due to family instability and separation, alongside the overall economic insecurity for many families. For low-income people, help for these legal issues seems unattainable. The Louisiana Bar Foundation (LBF) realizes that access to civil legal aid is crucial to Louisiana’s recovery.

Despite such a difficult year, I also witnessed strength, growth and courage through our dedicated service providers, Fellows, volunteers and staff. Near the end of 2021, I traveled the state with the LBF POP UP TOUR to educate stakeholders on the LBF, how we operate, the growing need for civil legal aid in Louisiana, and how we are meeting those needs. We visit-

ed with people from our nine Community Partnership Panel regions: Greater Orleans, Northshore, Capital Area, Bayou Region, Acadiana, Southwest, Northeast, Northwest and Central. Each POP UP featured presentations from the region’s Community Partnership Panel chair, a local judicial officer and a local grantee. They talked about the LBF’s community-driven efforts to help thousands of Louisiana residents access the legal system and the value of being a part of the LBF community. As an organization that serves more than 70 grantees across Louisiana’s 64 parishes, we recognize that it is imperative to connect with those who have firsthand experience with local civil legal aid issues.

We kicked off the tour live streaming a breakfast in the conference room at Phelps Dunbar in New Orleans. Judge Jay C. Zainey asked attendees, “How many of you went to law school because you wanted to change the world?” He followed with, “No one on earth can change the



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world, but we can do our part to change people’s worlds.” Judge Zainey’s statement resonated throughout the tour.

At the end of my travels, there was no doubt in my mind that the work of the LBF is critical to the stability of individuals, families, our community and our state. This tour was essential to educating the public, engaging with their needs, and uplifting their voices to advocate for what is specifically needed in their communities. While visiting the Acadiana Region, Judge Marilyn Castle said something that stuck with me: “To have the ability to give people resources is priceless.” I could not agree more. I knew I made the right choice in signing on to work with the LBF, a group of dedicated volunteers, Fellows, grantees and staff, all of whom put their time, energy and hearts into helping improve our state.

This is my final President’s Message in this role. I am very proud of the LBF’s staff, its Fellows and its volunteers. I’m proud of the LBF’s contributions to our legal system and our state. Finally, I am grateful for this year’s experience and proud to be a Fellow of the LBF!

Annual LBF Fellows Membership Meeting Set for Friday, April 22

The Louisiana Bar Foundation’s (LBF) Annual Fellows Membership Meeting will begin at noon on Friday, April 22. This luncheon meeting is an opportunity for Fellows to be updated on LBF activities and elect new board members. The President’s Award will be presented, and recognition will be given to the 2021 Distinguished Honorees and

the Calogero Justice Award recipient.

All LBF Fellows in good standing will receive an official meeting notice with the Board slate and a committee selection form in early March. For more information, contact Danielle Jordan Marshall at (504)561-1046 or email danielle@raisingthebar.org.

LBF Announces New Fellows

The Louisiana Bar Foundation welcomed the following new Fellows:

- Julie Schwartzwald Meaders..... Metairie
- Audrius M. Reed Shreveport
- Chloe RippelNew Orleans
- Jason R. Smith Monroe
- Breyahna K. Williams Alexandria