

SOLACE:

From a Simple Idea, Many Lives Have Been Changed

By Hon. Jay C. Zainey

SOLACE (Support of Lawyers/Legal Personnel — All Concern Encouraged) is a Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA) program, under the purview of the LSBA/Louisiana Bar Foundation's Community Action Committee. The program was organized as a result of a near-tragedy experienced by an LSBA member.

Afterwards, SOLACE co-founder Mark C. Surprenant, senior partner in the New Orleans-based firm of Adams and Reese, L.L.P., had a very simple idea: Why can't we, as members of our legal community family, help each other in times of need?

Much has happened in the two years since I last wrote an article in the *Louisiana Bar Journal* on the SOLACE program (December 2009/January 2010). In that issue, I complimented the 5,000-plus wonderful members of our legal community who signed up for the program. Since the program's inception on Oct. 28, 2002, hundreds of members of our legal community have been assisted by other members of our legal community — and their families and friends — in their times of need. Today, there are more than 7,500 members in SOLACE. There are now SOLACE programs sponsored by state and local bar associations and numerous local chapters of the Federal Bar Association throughout the country (thanks to LSBA member Ashley L. Belleau, former president of the Federal Bar Association), including Rhode Island, Delaware, Nebraska, Nevada, Ohio, New Mexico (beginning in June 2012), Puerto

Rico, Louisville, St. Louis and in many other cities and states across the nation. Plans are underway to develop programs in New Hampshire, Georgia, Washington, D.C., El Paso, Ft. Lauderdale and in many other cities and states.

Think about it. In Louisiana alone, if each member of SOLACE has 10 family members, neighbors and friends in his/her "network," that means more than 75,000 people can potentially be in a position of assisting a member of the legal community in times of need.

In my previous article, I shared various instances in which members of our legal community came to bat for each other. Following are more examples.

SOLACE Request: Medical Transportation

Medical Transportation Immediately Needed. While on a trip out of the country, the 19-month-old daughter of two members of our legal community was diagnosed with encephalitis and was kept in a medically induced coma. Their daughter, who was on oxygen and very

ill, needed immediate medical evacuation transportation to Children's Hospital in New Orleans. Unfortunately, through an insurance snafu, they were unable to get their carrier to pay for the medical evacuation airlift, and the young family found themselves stranded. The request was circulated at 11:54 p.m. A number of wonderful members of our legal community responded. By 11:25 the next morning, the family's transportation issues were resolved, and, soon thereafter, the family was on its way to New Orleans for their child's much needed medical treatment.

Response from her father: "Our daughter was admitted to Children's Hospital and has already started some physical therapy . . . Aggressive rehab is the best chance we have at getting our daughter back to her old self, and it would not be getting started without the efforts of SOLACE. I'm still in awe at how this all happened . . ." Response from her mother: "We were truly overwhelmed by the offers of help and support that we received from the SOLACE community. I am so proud to be a part of the legal community."

SOLACE Request: Accommodations

Accommodations in Jackson, Miss., Needed for a Paralegal and Her Family While the Paralegal's Son is Undergoing Rehabilitation for Recent Accident. A SOLACE member's secretary/paralegal of 25 years had a tragedy on Thanksgiving Day. Her 15-year-old son fell from a deer stand and broke his neck. He was paralyzed and the family needed accommodations in Jackson for the long rehabilitation process.

Response from the family: "It is truly heartwarming to know that there are so many people that can come together to render assistance to another member of our profession with the matter of a few clicks of the keys. The responses were quick and effective but, most of all, they reflected the willingness to go the extra mile to assist a stranger. For someone to offer their house to a person that they did not know goes beyond the pale."

SOLACE Request: Assistance with Clinic

SOLACE Member Needs Assistance with Mayo Clinic. "Does anyone have a contact at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota who can assist a SOLACE member suffering from fibromyalgia?" Within a day, arrangements were being made for the SOLACE member to be admitted to the Mayo Clinic.

Response from the member: "I don't know if you ever thought that SOLACE could, in fact, be the gift of peace to those facing a life-and-death struggle. I was a man who had 'hit the wall' . . . even my practitioners spoke to me, treated me, as if I was already gone. SOLACE, and its eventual path which led me to (medical treatment), has raised the curtain of darkness which pervaded what was left of my life . . . Without SOLACE, my life would be one of counting down my moments left . . . SOLACE set in motion those events which will now prolong my

life rather than prolonging my death."

SOLACE Request: Circulated at 7:53 a.m.

A member of the legal community was diagnosed with uterine cancer and had to undergo surgery. She has two small children and one of them has Down's Syndrome. The family needed the following: CVS cards for prescriptions and medications; Rouse's/Winn Dixie gift cards for groceries; and KMart gift cards for clothes, toys, household items and other basics for the children.

Response from SOLACE: At 9:08 a.m., one hour and 15 minutes later, I received the following message from the person making the SOLACE request: "The response from SOLACE has been overwhelming. I still have 20 emails that I need to read . . ."

SOLACE Request: Circulated at 10:21 a.m.

The sister of a Baton Rouge attorney was killed and her brother was in a medically induced coma in South Africa after being struck by a hit-and-run driver. The request sought contacts with an air evacuation/medical plane company to assist the attorney's family.

Response from SOLACE: One hour and five minutes later, at 11:26 a.m., this seemingly impossible request was responded to by the CEO of Oschner Hospital in New Orleans. The brother of a New Orleans SOLACE member was a physician at the hospital and arrangements were made to bring the family members home to Louisiana.

The list of examples goes on and on. SOLACE asks LSBA members to do two things:

First, be our eyes and ears. It costs you nothing. Let us know if you hear of any member of the legal community, or members of their families, who might have a need. We will circulate the request to our fellow SOLACE members and get

results. The requestor's name is anonymous. Although we hope that you sign up for the SOLACE program, you do not need to be a member of the program to make a request. You merely need to be a member of the legal community.

Second, join us by signing up for the program. Again, it costs you nothing and you will never be asked for a contribution. Hopefully, you and your family will never need our services. However, by being on the email list, you will see firsthand what members of the legal community are doing for each other in their times of need. By reading the SOLACE requests, and by seeing the responses, you will agree that we are truly members of an honorable profession.

To become a member of SOLACE, or to make an anonymous request, simply email Mark Surprenant at mark.surprenant@arlaw.com, or Jay C. Zainey at jay_zainey@laed.uscourts.gov.

In closing, read the following remarks from one of our fellow attorneys: "There are not enough words to express my gratitude for the things that SOLACE did for me . . . I still break out in tears when I think of all the wonderful acts of kindness that were bestowed upon us . . . I would like to thank EVERYONE who assisted a fellow member of the legal profession — a total stranger — in my time of need."

Powerful message, isn't it? That, my friends, is what we as members of the legal community family do for each other in our times of need.

Hon. Jay C. Zainey was appointed to the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana in 2002. During his 1995-96 term as Louisiana State Bar Association president, he created the Community Action Committee and the Legal Services for Persons with Disabilities Committee.

He is a co-founder of SOLACE. In 2004, he organized the Homeless Experience Legal Protection (H.E.L.P.) Program. (Ste. C-455, 500 Poydras St., New Orleans, LA 70130)

