

ATJ Developing Leadership Internship Program Established

By Mark C. Surprenant

During the March 2015 Access to Justice Summit, participants concluded that cultivating the next generation of access to justice leaders should not only be a priority but is necessary as sensible succession planning to ensure continued efforts within Louisiana's justice community.

In response, representatives of the Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA), the Louisiana Bar Foundation, Louisiana civil legal aid providers, the Louisiana District Judges Association, Louisiana law schools, the Louisiana Supreme Court and private bar law firms joined forces to create the ATJ Developing Leadership Intern Program. This new initiative is a unique opportunity for law students to gain the insight and skills needed to become the next generation of access to justice leaders.

Only four students were selected to participate in the inaugural program, one from each of Louisiana's law schools. The interns worked with several civil legal aid providers and judges and were sponsored by law firms with records of dedication to access to justice issues. Weekly programming focused on the various civil legal needs of low-income people; the ways in which organizations within the justice community address those needs; and how these services are increasing the quality of life for those served.

The sponsoring law firms were Adams and Reese, L.L.P.; Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz, P.C.; Jones Walker, L.L.P.; and Phelps Dunbar, L.L.P.

On the first day of the program, the interns were treated to lunch with Louisiana Supreme Court Chief Justice Bernette Joshua Johnson and toured the Louisiana Supreme Court.

During the remainder of the five-week program, the two Baton Rouge interns worked with Judge Suzan S. Ponder (Baton Rouge City Court), Judge Lisa M.



The inaugural ATJ Developing Leadership Intern Program included four current law students and involved four sponsoring law firms. From left, Christopher K. Ralston, Phelps Dunbar, L.L.P.; Sarah Smith-Clevenger, Tulane Law School; Annie Lemoine, Loyola University College of Law; Louisiana Supreme Court Chief Justice Bernette Joshua Johnson; Kara Brown, Southern University Law Center; Hilary Renshaw, Louisiana State University Paul M. Hebert Law Center; Christopher M. Vitenas, Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz, P.C.; and Mark C. Surprenant, Adams and Reese, L.L.P.

Woodruff-White (East Baton Rouge Family Court), the Baton Rouge Bar Foundation's Pro Bono Program, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge and Southeast Louisiana Legal Services. The two New Orleans interns worked with Judge John J. Molaison, Jr. (24th Judicial District Court), Judge Bernadette G. D'Souza (Orleans Parish Civil District Court), Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, the Louisiana Civil Justice Center, The Pro Bono Project of New Orleans and Southeast Louisiana Legal Services.

In addition, all interns were invited to attend an Access to Justice Commission meeting, the LSBA's Pro Bono and Children's Law Awards Ceremony, and a lunch panel with Judge Jay C. Zainey (U.S. District Court, Eastern District of Louisiana) and Judge Stephen A. Higginson (U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals).

Attorney Christopher K. Ralston with the New Orleans office of Phelps Dunbar, L.L.P., said of the program, "Phelps Dunbar and its attorneys feel passionately about ensuring that our legal system is fair, just and accessible to all. This means not only dedicating our time and resources to providing pro bono assistance to those less fortunate, but also ensuring that this

commitment is carried on by future generations. The ATJ Developing Leadership Internship Program allows our firm to mentor and develop future access to justice leaders in our community — an opportunity we cannot resist and a responsibility we will not ignore."

Intern Annie Lemoine, a Loyola University College of Law student and Adams and Reese intern, said, "This program was a rare opportunity that has invigorated my passion for social justice and solidified my commitment to public interest work. Through this program I have begun to develop the skills of a leader — I can identify problems, brainstorm solutions, and partner with others knowledgeable in the area to put these ideas into action. It is a newfound confidence that I have never felt so powerfully, and I cannot wait to see what will happen."

Mark C. Surprenant, a partner in the New Orleans office of Adams and Reese, L.L.P., assisted in the coordination of the ATJ Developing Leadership Intern Program for this firm. (mark.surprenant@arlaw.com; One Shell Square, Ste. 4500, 701 Poydras St., New Orleans, LA 70139)

