

# Distinguished Access to Justice Pro Bono Fellows Program: One Should Never Retire from Doing Good for Others

By Mark C. Surprenant



Louisiana Supreme Court Chief Justice Bernette Joshua Johnson addressed the Distinguished ATJ Fellows, representatives of partner host entities and other guests attending the program launch in January.

The headline of this article is a most appropriate motto for the new Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA) Distinguished Access to Justice (ATJ) Pro Bono Fellows Program, launched with a special ceremony at the Louisiana Supreme Court on Jan. 11, hosted by Chief Justice Bernette Joshua Johnson, one of the foremost leaders in Louisiana, and nationally, from an access to justice standpoint.

The program (a pilot program for 2018), under the purview of the LSBA's Access to Justice Commission, is for judges and lawyers who have transitioned, or are in the process of transitioning, from their service on the bench or from their law practice and who are interested in spending at least 20 hours per month in access to justice service to those in need. Louisiana is now only the second state in the nation, with Massachusetts being the other, to offer such a program.

Each Distinguished ATJ Fellow will partner with a particular host entity as they work together on critical issues in the access to justice community.

Unfortunately, Louisiana is one of the poorest states in the country and one of only a handful where there is no state funding for civil legal aid. Despite the work of many caring individuals and legal service providers throughout Louisiana, there are still far too many individuals and families who are shut out of the legal system each year because there is no lawyer available to assist them.

The "superstars" in the first class of Distinguished ATJ Fellows, along with their partner host entities, will make a significant difference in the lives of many during 2018 and will serve as role models for other Fellows and partner host entities to follow in their footsteps for years to come.

"Louisiana is fortunate to have such outstanding lawyers named as the first Distinguished Access to Justice Pro Bono Fellows," said Chief Justice Johnson. "These lawyers continue to make a significant contribution to our community, even after retirement, when they could be devoting their time to personal projects. We honor their continued involvement and dedication in the delivery of legal services to those most in need of assistance."

Below are profiles of the first class of Distinguished ATJ Fellows, listed with



The members in the first class of the Louisiana State Bar Association Distinguished Access to Justice Pro Bono Fellows Program are, from left, Sarah J. (Jamie) Campbell, Hugh R. Straub, Valerie T. Schexnayder, Judy Perry Martinez and Thomas E. Gibbs (inset).



their partner host entities.

### **Sarah J. (Jamie) Campbell / Acadiana Legal Services**

Campbell retired in 2017 from her position as directing attorney for the Baton Rouge office of Southeast Louisiana Legal Services. Throughout her approximate 40-year legal career, she worked on a daily basis serving the poor and the needy in many ways as they struggled to participate in a meaningful way in the justice system.

In addition to working at Southeast Louisiana Legal Services for 12 years, she worked for 23 years with Kisatchie Legal Services, 19 of those years as executive director. She also worked for three years with Legal Services of North Louisiana as its litigation director.

Campbell has received numerous awards for her service to the poor, including the LSBA Career Public Interest Award, the LSU Law Center Public Interest Law Society Alumni Pro Bono Service Award and, in 2017, the LSBA President's Access to Justice Award.

As a Distinguished ATJ Fellow for 2018, she will partner with Acadiana Legal Services and continue to make a difference in the lives of those less fortunate in the areas of Louisiana served by Acadiana Legal Services.

### **Thomas E. Gibbs / East Baton Rouge Family Court**

Gibbs has been a practicing lawyer (sole practitioner) in Baton Rouge for the past 42 years, focusing his practice in family law.

For the past two years, he has offered his services to the East Baton Rouge Family

Court and other courts adjacent to East Baton Rouge. Specifically, Judge Lisa M. Woodruff-White and other judges assign particular self-represented litigant matters to him. He serves as a pro bono mediator for the court, whereby he meets with the parties and helps them work through their differences with the goal of reaching a settlement which can be approved by the court on that same day.

Gibbs also has been serving as a parenting coordinator on a pro bono basis. In that role, he manages high-conflict custody cases, facilitates communication between the adverse parents, helps them improve their parenting skills, and, hopefully, gets them to resolve their conflicts and disputes in an amicable manner.

Judge Woodruff-White said Gibbs has provided, and continues to provide, an invaluable service to her court and to many self-represented litigants. In December 2017, he successfully mediated all eight self-represented litigant matters pending on Judge Woodruff-White's docket.

As a Distinguished ATJ Fellow for 2018, Gibbs will continue his access to justice pro bono work for the East Baton Rouge Family Court and other courts in the Baton Rouge area.

### **Judy Perry Martinez / Southeast Louisiana Legal Services**

Martinez is presently of counsel with the New Orleans firm Simon, Peragine, Smith & Redfearn, L.L.P. She was a partner in the firm from 1982-2003 before she joined Northrop Grumman and became

assistant general counsel for litigation and vice president and chief compliance officer. She retired from Northrop Grumman in 2015 to become a Fellow at the Advanced Leadership Initiative at Harvard University, where she spent a year in residence. Her commitment to public service began years ago when she and other members of the Louisiana bar established the New Orleans Pro Bono Project.

Over the years, she has been extensively involved with the American Bar Association (ABA). She was appointed chair of the ABA Standing Committee on the Federal Judiciary which evaluates all perspective nominees to the federal bench. She also served as the ABA lead representative to the United Nations, chaired the ABA Presidential Commission on the Future of Legal Services, and was a member of the ABA task force on building public trust in the American justice system. She is a past chair of the ABA Young Lawyers Division and is currently a special advisor to the ABA Center for Innovation.

Martinez has received numerous awards for her public service, including the LSBA President's Award twice, the Camille Gravel Public Service Award from the Federal Bar Association-Eastern District of Louisiana Chapter, the LSBA's David A. Hamilton Lifetime Achievement Award and the Presidents' Award from the New Orleans Bar Association.

As a Distinguished ATJ Fellow for 2018, she will partner with Southeast Louisiana Legal Services (SLLS) for several projects during the SLLS's 50th anniversary. She will continue her work supporting Flood Proof and its expansions. She will work with SLLS to create a Veterans Legal Needs Check-Up App and web-based platform that can be used by veterans, VA hospital social workers and case managers to help screen, identify and refer veterans to civil legal resources. She will also help SLLS further explore and develop the use of technology to better assist clients in rural areas.

**Valerie T. Schexnayder /  
Baton Rouge Bar Association**

Schexnayder was an attorney with Zurich Insurance Co. in Baton Rouge for nine years at the time of her retirement in 2016. Previously, she was a partner in the



**Mark C. Surprenant, chair of the LSBA Distinguished Access to Justice Pro Bono Fellows Program Committee, addressed those attending the program launch ceremony.**

firm Hailey, McNamara, Hall, Larman & Papale, L.L.P., and was a founding partner of the firm deLaup, Schexnayder & Miranda. She is currently a certified mediator.

Active in LSBA leadership for many years, she currently serves on the Board of Governors and was a member of the House of Delegates. For the past 14 years, she has been a Louisiana bar assistant examiner for the Louisiana Code of Civil Procedure. She is a recipient of the LSBA's Michelle Pitard Wynne Professionalism Award and is a Louisiana Bar Foundation Fellow.

As a Distinguished ATJ Fellow for 2018, Schexnayder will partner with the Baton Rouge Bar Association as it develops and grows its pro bono outreach to veterans and their families and plans other significant access to justice projects. When asked on her application why she was interested in becoming a Distinguished ATJ Fellow, she said, "I want to spend my retirement years making a difference in the lives of others."

**Hugh R. Straub /  
The Pro Bono Project**

Straub retired as a partner in the firm Phelps Dunbar, L.L.P., in 2011. Since then, he has served in an of-counsel-retired capacity with the firm. Before joining Phelps Dunbar in 2006, he was the co-managing partner of Terriberry, Carroll & Yancey, L.L.P.

He has a strong military and marine background. He received his undergraduate degree from the SUNY Marine College, achieved the rank of lieutenant in the U.S. Naval Reserve, is a merchant marine officer, and holds a U.S. Coast Guard license.

Straub has made numerous access to justice contributions over the years. Immediately upon retirement from Phelps Dunbar, he took on the pro bono defense of an 18-year-old accused of second-degree murder of one person and the attempted mur-

der of another. Following a plea agreement reached on the morning of trial, whereby the person agreed to serve a 21-year sentence, Straub has visited that person in prison each month to provide him with emotional support and to encourage him to participate in available educational programs.

For the past several years, he has overseen and actively participated in a joint effort by the Order of St. Lazarus and the New Orleans Public Library to provide free instruction to documented immigrants, preparing them for their citizenship examination.

For the past five years, Straub has served as a volunteer for the Louisiana Civil Justice Center at the Orleans Parish Civil District Court Self-Help Desk two mornings each week.

As a Distinguished ATJ Fellow for 2018, Straub will continue his work in connection with the Self-Help Desk at the Orleans Parish Civil District Court, which service to self-represented litigants now falls under the supervision of The Pro Bono Project which has agreed to serve as his partner host for 2018.

**Future Fellows and Partner  
Host Entities**

Anyone interested in participating in this program, either as a Fellow or as a partner host entity, should email Mark C. Surprenant at [mark.surprenant@arlaw.com](mailto:mark.surprenant@arlaw.com). Judges and attorneys are needed to continue reaching for the goal of ensuring that all needy Louisiana individuals and families receive meaningful access to the legal justice system.

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