



By Joseph L. (Larry) Shea, Jr.

This Holiday Season

As I write this message, we are entering the holiday season and anticipating celebrations for Thanksgiving, Christmas and Hanukkah. I find this time of year to be a truly joyous one. It is a time that I am most thankful for my family and friends who provide me with so much support and encouragement throughout the year (especially over the last few years during which much of my time has been spent “on the road”). I am particularly thankful this year for the opportunities I have had as president of the Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA).



Louisiana State Bar Association President Joseph L. (Larry) Shea, Jr., far right, attended several “Lawyers in Libraries” events in south Louisiana on the Oct. 23 Day of Service, including the program at the St. Charles Parish Library’s East Regional Branch in Destrehan. From left, Day of Service lawyer volunteers Bryant S. York and Jeremy T. Grabill, library branch manager Tara Lombardi, Public Relations and Adult Programming Librarian Lauren Pitz and Shea.

I will never forget being accorded the privilege of participating in the ceremonies admitting and welcoming new attorneys into the profession, and then also participating in the solemn ceremonies recognizing and honoring those lawyers who have passed on. These gatherings by the state and local Bars are a valuable part of the traditions of our profession.

On Oct. 23, I enjoyed spending time visiting several libraries in south Louisiana where lawyers were helping the public on our Day of Service. But what I will remember most of that event, and the days leading up to it, is the hard work of

LSBA Access to Justice Director Monte Mollere and his staff and all of the many lawyers who unselfishly volunteered their time to make that day such a success. There were lawyers in libraries in every parish of the state. I am proud that the LSBA launched the Legal Education and Assistance Program (LEAP) and the Lawyers in Libraries component of that program during my term as president. It is an admirable undertaking and one that I hope will make a difference in improving access to justice in the years to come.

It is my impression that most people, just like me, are thankful and find the



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@LSBA_President Larry Shea honoring deceased members of the bench & bar at the LSBA Memorial Exercises.



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holiday season to be a fun time of the year filled with parties, celebrations and social gatherings. Most of us will enjoy family dinners with turkey and dressing, cranberry sauce, green bean casseroles and cornbread (in the south, and maybe even gumbo the further south you go), followed by apple and pecan pies (or, if relatives are coming to north Louisiana from the south, a pie or two from Lea's). Many of us will delight in being with friends united together in front of TVs watching parades and bowl games. For many more of us, there will be festive office parties where our business associates and their families take time from their busy lives to get together and visit about the past year's activities. There will be numerous religious gatherings and celebrations, whether they be for Christmas, Hanukkah or other reasons to celebrate the season, at which a large number of us will find contentment and inspiration.

Unfortunately, for all too many people, and particularly for all too many lawyers, the holiday season is a time filled with sadness, self-reflection, loneliness and anxiety. It is a season that comes with a "holiday depression" of its own which can affect anyone, whether it be due to time pressures, family issues, financial worries, memories of past holidays or just loneliness. This "holiday depression" is far more serious for those who already suffer from some form of depression. Studies show that clinical depression is

experienced by nearly 10 percent of the general population of the United States. There are other studies that suggest lawyers are 3.6 times more likely to suffer depression than non-lawyers. Right now, we do not know exactly why this occurs. Many guess that the higher rate of depression is due to demanding schedules and other sources of stress inherent in the practice of law. And this depression is not without consequences, the most serious of which is suicide. A study in 2009 indicated that suicide was the 10th leading cause of death in the United States. The staggering number of suicides in the legal profession ranks fourth when compared to the frequency of suicides in all other occupations. It deeply saddens me to know personally that we have not escaped this problem in Louisiana.

Due to this increasingly disturbing crisis in the legal profession, this issue of our *Louisiana Bar Journal* is devoted to mental wellness. We have included articles concerning mental illness and substance abuse among lawyers and how these problems may be effectively recognized and treated. The LSBA knows all too well the importance of addressing issues of depression, substance abuse and suicide within our profession. The LSBA leadership has worked hard over the last few years with our Committee on Alcohol and Drug Abuse and our Lawyers Assistance Program (LAP) and

its Executive Director Buddy Stockwell to establish a lawyers' assistance program designed to meet the needs of our members. Through proper funding and direction, your Board of Governors has approved a program that will properly staff LAP, expand LAP's mental health services in the areas of depression, stress management and professional burnout, and provide preventive services and programs to assist our members. All of this will be available to our members on a confidential basis.

In addition, Buddy Stockwell and I wrote to you on Nov. 5 asking you to participate in a survey by the American Bar Association's Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs designed to ascertain the current rates of substance abuse, depression and anxiety among legal professionals. This will be of benefit to "virtually all sectors of the legal profession." I again encourage you to participate in the survey.

The holiday season is a time of both "thanks" and "giving." For those of us fortunate enough to be enjoying this holiday season, let us keep in mind that there are many of our colleagues who are suffering during this time of year. You may recognize it in an uncharacteristic lack of interest in personal appearance or social withdrawal or even increased complaints about aches and pains. If you see it, take that opportunity to "give." I am no expert in this but I understand that asking how you might be able to help and offering kind words of encouragement could make a difference. If you observe a situation that appears to be a truly serious one, or if you yourself are experiencing depression, do not hesitate to contact LAP for help.

"They might not need me; but they might. I'll let my head be just in sight. A smile as small as mine might be precisely their necessity."

—Emily Dickinson

It is my sincere hope that each and every one of you has a safe and Happy Holiday!