



# One on One with Darrel J. Papillion, 76th LSBA President:

*Gen-X President to Focus on Plans  
to Evaluate and Streamline  
Essential LSBA Resources*

Interviewed by Alainna R. Mire, LSBA Secretary

**D**arrel J. Papillion, the 76th president of the Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA), grew up in the rural St. Landry Parish community of Swords, a tiny country hamlet between the small Louisiana towns of Eunice and Opelousas. He attended public schools in Eunice, graduating from Eunice High School in 1986. He studied at three separate Louisiana State University institutions — LSU at Eunice, where he was student body president in 1987; LSU A&M in Baton Rouge, where he graduated in 1990; and LSU Paul M. Hebert Law Center, where he graduated in 1994.

Darrel J. Papillion, second from left, of Baton Rouge is the 76th president of the Louisiana State Bar Association. With him are family members, from left, son Jude, 15; his wife, Shirley; and his daughter Anna Claire, 13. Photo by Heather Bush, with bush-photography in Baton Rouge.

After law school, he worked for a year as a law clerk for Louisiana Supreme Court Justice Catherine D. Kimball before joining the New Orleans office of McGlinchey Stafford, P.L.L.C., in 1995. He practiced in McGlinchey's Products Liability Section until 1999, when he accepted a job as a plaintiff's lawyer at the Moore, Walters, Thompson firm in Baton Rouge. He would later become a named partner in that firm before leaving with three of his partners to start the firm of Walters, Papillion, Thomas, Cullens, L.L.C., also in Baton Rouge. He has been married to his wife Shirley Papillion, a former elementary school teacher, since 1991. Their son Jude is 15, and their daughter Anna Claire is 13.

Anyone who knows Darrel well knows he is really *busy*. He has been known to send very early — *as in 3:30 a.m.* — emails while juggling a very busy law practice, a growing family, bar activities, community service and volunteer work, and teaching numerous CLE courses in addition to teaching a class to juniors and seniors for the past 15 years at the LSU Law Center. Over the last few years, he has served as president of the Rotary Club of Baton Rouge, a 500-member Rotary club that is typically ranked as one of the 10 largest clubs in the world; as president of the Baton Rouge Bar Association; and as president of the Wex Malone Chapter of the American Inn of Court. He also has served on numerous community boards, including the Louisiana Bar Foundation, Teach for America and the Louisiana Public Broadcasting Foundation.

While he has started working more conventional hours over the last few years, he still packs in a full day before trying to have dinner with his family every night and before catching up on whatever Netflix or cable series he and Shirley are binge-watching at the time. He can typically be seen with a broad smile . . . and his ever-present smartphone — texting, emailing, calling and reading the latest news from his Twitter feed and several news apps. He jokes that he is either “the youngest old guy” (he still dictates and relies heavily on two legal assistants) or the “oldest young guy” (he embraces new technology and wants to stay at the cutting edge of information and technology in the handling of his cases and law practice).



**Darrel J. Papillion with his wife Shirley Papillion.** Photo by Heather Bush, with bush-photography in Baton Rouge.

**Journal:** First, thank you for granting the *Journal* the exclusive “one-on-one” interview. I, personally, enjoy engaging in ice-breaker games when meeting new people. As the new LSBA president, tell us something about yourself that most people do not know. For instance, do you speak a foreign language, play a team sport or play an instrument?

**Papillion:** People might be surprised to know I learned to speak French as a child at the same time I learned to speak English. I grew up in Acadiana in the little community of Swords, between Eunice and Opelousas in St. Landry Parish. My Papillion grandparents lived next door to us, and they could speak only a few words of English. I do not play any musical instruments, but I was a radio disc jockey in high school and college at radio stations in Eunice and Lafayette, in both French and English.

**Journal:** Well, I definitely learned something new because I have never heard of Swords. Being from Scott, I thought I knew the names of most Acadiana communities. Growing up in a small community, I am sure that family was very important to you. Tell us about your family.

**Papillion:** I have a beautiful family — just look at the cover of the *Journal*!

Seriously, I have been married to my lovely wife Shirley for 25 years. We met on a blind date and were married two years later. I could not be LSBA president, or much else, without her undying love and support. Shirley earned her college degree and a special certification to teach elementary school while I was finishing law school and clerking for the Louisiana Supreme Court. She taught school for 20 years in New Orleans and Baton Rouge and retired last year so we could both spend more time with our two teenage children, son Jude and daughter Anna Claire, before they leave home for college in a few years. Jude and Anna keep us very busy, and Shirley keeps us all in line.

Growing up, I had great parents. My dad was a rural school bus driver and deputy sheriff, and my mother worked for the local school system. They were very hardworking people who believed very strongly in education. I believe their proudest accomplishment was that all three of their children graduated from college. I have two sisters, both of whom are married and have families of their own. My sister Amanda lives in Baton Rouge and works for the Attorney General's Office, and my sister Kim lives in San Antonio and works as an elementary school assistant principal. My dad passed away last year, but my mother

lives in Baton Rouge, where my parents retired a little over 10 years ago.

**Journal:** When did you know you wanted to become a lawyer?

**Papillion:** I was one of those people who “always wanted to be a lawyer.” I remember inviting Jacque Pucheu, a lawyer in Eunice, to speak to my class about his work as a lawyer when I was in middle school, but I probably developed a strong interest in being a lawyer several years earlier. Jimmy Simien, a lawyer in Baton Rouge, married one of my cousins while Jimmy was an LSU Law student, and I was not quite in high school. Poor Jimmy probably dreaded family holiday dinners because I peppered him with questions about law school and being a lawyer over every holiday meal for years.

**Journal:** I am glad you bombarded Jimmy with questions about becoming a lawyer. But if you were not a lawyer, what would you be doing?

**Papillion:** That’s not a fair question. I could only be a lawyer. If I weren’t a lawyer, I’d have to do a job that is very busy and has lots of interaction with people. I sometimes secretly think that if I get bored when I retire from the practice, I’ll get a job as the very talkative driver of an airport shuttle bus, or be the “So, where are you folks from?” tour guide at a museum, ball park or historic site. My dad was like that. He retired from the sheriff’s department and went back to work after a couple of years because he missed working. Seriously, if I absolutely couldn’t be a lawyer, at this point in my life, I would choose a career in the judiciary or in non-profit public service.

**Journal:** Well, since you are a lawyer (and a very busy one), tell us about your practice.

**Papillion:** I am a partner at Walters, Papillion, Thomas, Cullens in Baton Rouge, a nine-lawyer plaintiff firm. I am really fortunate to represent a lot of wonderful people, most of whom have gone through some kind of tragedy. Most of my work involves representing people who are badly hurt, or the families of people who have been killed, in accidents. Because I work in Baton Rouge, where there are so many petrochemical plants, a busy port and a busy interstate system, my cases often



Shirley and Darrel Papillion, from left, with Louisiana Supreme Court Chief Justice Bernette Joshua Johnson and her daughter Rachael D. Johnson at the 2015 LSBA Annual Meeting. Photo by Matthew Hinton Photography.

arise out of plant explosions, deaths on the river, or serious traffic accidents. I practiced for several years as a defense lawyer at McGlinchey Stafford in New Orleans, where I did products liability defense work, so I am often referred products liability and other complex cases. Most of my work is referred to me by the defense bar, judges, other plaintiff lawyers or my former clients. I really enjoy my work. Our firm is able to handle complex and difficult cases, so even though I practice at a relatively small firm in a mid-sized city, I occasionally get to handle difficult cases against lawyers from some of the best firms in the country, and my work causes me to travel all over the country and sometimes out of the country for depositions and other legal work. I also work with the Perry Dampf Dispute Solutions Mediation Group as a mediator and have been appointed as a Special Master in complex litigation.

**Journal:** I was told by a mentor that as lawyers we need to schedule time for ourselves and our family. With your busy schedule, what do you do to relax and unwind?

**Papillion:** I often joke that I have “no hobbies,” but this is probably not true. While I do not engage in the usual south Louisiana hobbies of hunting, fishing or golf, I spend a lot of time reading, mostly history and biographies. I recently started reading historical fiction which I find enjoyable. I am also a huge LSU football fan — my wife might say “huge” is an understatement. I have missed only a handful of LSU home games over the past 25 years, and I usually go to a couple of away games every season. I have been to almost every SEC stadium



At the LSBA Annual Meeting in 2009, Darrel Papillion was awarded a certificate of appreciation for his service by Hon. Elizabeth Erny Foote, then-LSBA president. Photo by Matthew Hinton Photography.

and have seen the Tigers play all over the country. Aside from that, I enjoy spending time with my family. My wife and I also enjoy watching mysteries and thrillers, so we often find ourselves “binge watching” some newly discovered series on Netflix or cable, sometimes while drinking a glass of wine after putting our children to bed. My family thinks I am a pretty good cook, and I enjoy cooking mostly traditional south Louisiana food on the weekends.

**Journal:** Now you are just making me hungry. I am sure you learned to cook from your parents and grandparents, but what about learning the practice of law. Who were some of your role models in the practice of law and legal profession?

**Papillion:** I have been really blessed to have so many mentors and role models. You’re going to get me in trouble because I am going to not include one or more



At the 2016 LSBA Midyear Meeting, Darrel Papillion addressed attendees at the 50-, 60- and 70-Year Member Reception. Photo by Matthew Hinton Photography.



Darrel Papillion, right, and D. Abboud Thomas participated in the 2010 LSBA House of Delegates meeting at Annual Meeting. Photo by Matthew Hinton Photography.

people who deserve recognition. I have to start with my parents, especially my father. Even though he was not a lawyer, he was someone who people in our tiny rural community relied upon for help and advice with the ordinary problems of life. He was an elected member of the St. Landry Parish Police Jury, a deputy sheriff, and was active politically, so it was very common for people having some kind of problem to ask him for help and advice. I saw this as a young person, and I believe it made me want to be a lawyer.

I owe a debt of gratitude to almost all the lawyers in Eunice and several in Opelousas who were so helpful to me. I worked summers in the District Attorney's Office in Opelousas under District Attorney Morgan Goudeau, who remains a dear friend of mine. Assistant District Attorneys Jack Burson, Don Richard, Richard Millspaugh and Earl Taylor, who is now serving as district attorney, were my first real teachers in this profession. Past LSBA President Leslie Schiff was certainly a role model. I had great professors at LSU Law Center. I couldn't possibly list them all, but I have to recognize Frank Maraist and Bill Corbett. Once I became a lawyer, I had an incredible mentor in Justice Catherine Kimball, for whom I clerked over 20 years ago. She taught me a tremendous amount. I owe a great deal of thanks to all the Justices at the Louisiana Supreme Court from that era, including Chief Justice

Bernette Joshua Johnson, who is the only justice still on the court from those days. They were very kind and encouraging to me. It was a great first job.

My first law firm was McGlinchey Stafford, and I couldn't possibly list all the lawyers there who were role models for me, but I would be negligent if I failed to mention Woody Norwood who I am still trying, without complete success, to emulate. My long-time law partner and dear friend Ed Walters spent years training and teaching me. I can never repay him for all he has taught me. I owe him and all the lawyers I've worked with at Walters, Papillion, Thomas, Cullens and our former firm a great deal. My law partners Abboud Thomas and J. Cullens have been my friends since law school, and it is great to work with them every day. I also owe thanks to a lot of judges, going back over 20 years, all across the state, and especially those on the bench of my local courts in Baton Rouge. I couldn't possibly list them all, but Judges Ralph Tyson, Frank Polozola and my friend and neighbor Judge Jim Brady, all from the Middle District bench, have been great role models in all kinds of ways. I met Judge Carl Stewart when I was a law student, and he has been a friend and role model my entire career. Judge Beth Foote, a past LSBA president, is a dear friend of mine who gives me kind and patient advice. Judge Gene Thibodeaux and I are from the same area of St. Landry

Parish. I've been blessed with an awesome array of mentors, including so many past presidents of the LSBA (you know who you are and that I can't list all of you). I wouldn't be here without their combined efforts and gifts of time and patience.

**Journal:** The first time I met you was at a Board of Governors meeting about six or seven years ago. I became involved in bar activities thanks to an appointment by Karleen Green, a former chair of the Young Lawyers Division. How did you become involved in bar activities?

**Papillion:** I was lucky to work for firms that encouraged and supported my participation in the LSBA. My law partner Ed Walters encouraged me to become active years ago. I was elected to the House of Delegates almost 15 years ago, and, not long after that, President Larry Feldman appointed me chair of the Ethics Advisory Service. I was appointed to the Board of Governors to fill an unexpired term by President Guy DeLaup in 2008. I was later elected to a full term on the Board of Governors. I have also served for a number of years as one of the chairs of the CLE Committee and the Annual Meeting and Summer School Committee, and I have been on the Nominating Committee a few times. I can also thank all the Baton Rouge LSBA President "Mikes" (Rubin, McKay and Patterson) who encouraged and supported my LSBA involvement, as



Justice John L. Weimer, left, and Darrel Papillion spoke at the Supreme Court reception during the 2014 LSBA Annual Meeting. Photo by Matthew Hinton Photography.

did so many other past presidents. I also served for 10 years on the board of directors of the Baton Rouge Bar Association and was president of the Baton Rouge Bar Association in 2014.

**Journal:** The LSBA is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year. Although neither one of us has been practicing that long, how has the practice changed since you were first sworn in as a new lawyer? Has it changed for the better?

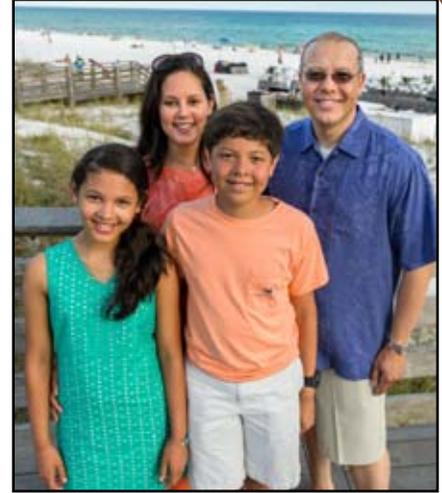
**Papillion:** We often hear the practice was once more civil or cordial. Honestly, in my experience, with only a few exceptions, I find lawyers to be as cordial today as when I started practicing. I believe “we get what we give.” In other words, cordiality and professionalism typically beget the same from our opponents. I believe the practice is more difficult today than it was 20 years ago because there is more competition across all practice areas for legal work, and many lawyers are having a hard time building, growing or maintaining their practices. This pressure forces lawyers to accept legal work they are not properly trained or equipped to handle. Years ago, lawyers were more likely to refer work outside of their practice areas or skill level to lawyers who might be better able to handle the work. Meanwhile, many clients have a hard time finding a lawyer who can solve their problems, making access to justice a bigger issue for some than it was 20 years ago.

On another level, I believe opportunities

for lawyers have, in many ways, dramatically improved over the past 20, and certainly 75, years. Many more women and minorities have been elected and appointed to the judiciary and have risen to leadership positions in law firms and in the legal profession. Today, men and women are entering the legal profession in almost equal numbers, so opportunity has certainly increased over the past 75 years for people who once had very little opportunity.

**Journal:** I agree that opportunities have increased because I never thought as a young lawyer I would be an officer of the LSBA. As the next Generation X president, this is going to be a big year for you. What are your objectives for your year as president?

**Papillion:** I believe every LSBA president approaches the job differently, but we should all remember it is a temporary job, and the year goes by very quickly. Next June, there will be a new president. Some presidents launch a bold new agenda and create several new programs. While this is very good, if each new president were to launch several new initiatives each year, we would also need a larger budget and more staff every year. My objective is to spend my year as president working to streamline our operations, evaluate our programs, and prudently manage our resources in a way that will allow us to effectively fulfill our mission as a mandatory bar association. The LSBA



Anna Claire, Shirley, Jude and Darrel Papillion at the Beach Bash during the 2014 LSBA Annual Meeting. Photo by Matthew Hinton Photography.

must be accountable, responsive and highly relevant to its core constituents which, of course, include the public, its 22,000-plus members, the Louisiana Supreme Court, Louisiana’s law schools, local bar associations, and the numerous affiliated entities that help serve the public and administer justice. The LSBA is an important arm of the Louisiana Supreme Court in the regulation of the practice of law. The public is best served when legal services are performed by providers who are properly educated and trained, carefully regulated and licensed, receive appropriate continuing legal education, and who adhere to the Rules of Professional Conduct and traditional standards of professionalism. The LSBA is critical to this important goal, and my goal is to work to keep the LSBA focused on this and to help provide equal access to justice for all the citizens of our state. I believe that’s enough to keep me, the LSBA board and the bar staff busy over the next year.

*Alainna R. Mire is serving her second year as secretary of the Louisiana State Bar Association and as editor of the Louisiana Bar Journal. She also has served as LSBA Young Lawyers Division chair and on the LSBA’s Board of Governors as House of Delegates Liaison Committee chair. She is the chief resilience officer and an assistant attorney for the City of Alexandria. (alainna.mire@cityofalex.com; 915 3rd St., Alexandria, LA 71301)*

