



By Dona Kay Renegar

# Let's Give Them Something to Talk About: #yourLSBA

For many years, we, as an Association, have battled the perception society has about lawyers and our practices. A number of years ago, television shows like “The Public Defender” and “Perry Mason” gave society the first visual representation of the practice of law, albeit in a criminal setting. With the increase in television shows about the practice of law, the opening of our courtrooms to the media and the advancement of social media, our everyday practices have had little effect on society’s perception of what we do. Members of our community, depending upon how old they are, see us as characters from “LA Law,” “Law & Order,” “Ally McBeal,” “Boston Legal,” or even “The People’s Court” and “Judge Judy.” We, as a profession, know and understand that these shows are not indicative of how we practice, the professionals that we are, or the difference we make in a civil society. Yet we struggle against the media’s representation of lawyers and the practice of law and the skewed image those representations create in the eyes of our citizens.

I suggest that the numerous shows on television, the advancement of social media, and the competitive nature of the practice of law in Louisiana will continue to control society’s perception of lawyers. A year ago, 2016-17 LSBA President Darrel Papillion asked us to consider what members of our society

expected when they called a lawyer’s office. He encouraged us to remember that our communities need lawyers as we are an essential component of a civilized society and will continue to serve that purpose regardless of the changes in technology or availability of legal forms from the Internet. Darrel is right and, while I welcome the inquiry into society’s perception of lawyers, I suggest that there is little control we have as an association to change that perception by looking *outside* of our membership. We do, however, have the ability to promote our members, their dedication to the practice of law, the necessary role they play in our justice system, and the time and resources they devote to their communities.

The practice of law is the last self-regulated profession in our state. While we have citizen members who serve on our disciplinary committees, our citizens have decided that, solely due to our decision to become lawyers, we are entrusted with disciplining our own members. Doctors are not allowed to regulate their own practices. Nurses are not allowed to regulate their own practices. Social workers are not allowed to regulate their own practices. But, we, as lawyers, are allowed to set the high standards to obtain a law license, maintain that license and represent our fellow citizens in our courts of law. That level of trust also brings a great responsibility. We must celebrate our members who excel in the

practice and in their ethical standards, and we must lift up those members who are struggling to meet those standards. That is the duty society has entrusted us with in allowing us to manage our own members, and it is an honor.

In this day of the 24-hour news cycle and the need to be the first to break a story, as opposed to getting the most accurate story, our most troubled members often get attention. I intend to spend my year celebrating our members who get up every day and diligently represent their clients with the highest of ethical and professional standards and with no expectation of recognition or gratitude. I would like to share their accomplishments with you via the LSBA’s social media platforms this year by using a new hashtag, #yourLSBA. I will recognize our members who are mentors to young lawyers and officers of the court in the truest sense of that term, and those who use their legal skills to benefit their communities. Over my years of practice, I have seen many of these attorneys and I have chosen a few to recognize now.

**Danny Landry** acted as a curator in a divorce case on behalf of an absentee defendant. After being unable to locate the defendant and taking the necessary steps attempting to do so, he filed an answer and the matter was set for trial. The attorney for the plaintiff sent a young associate to handle the trial of the matter and she struggled to properly introduce



2017-18 LSBA President Dona Kay Renegar during the Installation Luncheon at the LSBA Annual Meeting in Destin, Florida. Photo by Matthew Hinton Photography.

the necessary exhibits and ask the correct questions to establish her case. The judge became anxious and somewhat frustrated, and the young attorney became even more nervous as the hearing progressed. Danny moved for a recess, invited the young attorney into the hallway, and explained what needed to be done to establish a case. The professional courtesy and mentoring Danny Landry shared with that young lawyer represents the very best of #yourLSBA.

**Ric Mere's** oldest son attended school with a young man whose home life became unstable and whose basic physical needs were not being met. Out of concern for this young man, the Mere family discussed inviting him into their home and family. After much discussion and by unanimous agreement, Ric, his wife Kathy, and their sons, David and Andre, sought temporary custody of the young man and brought him to live with them as a member of their family. This young man flourished under their care and control. They had struggles along the way and the road was not always easy, but they persevered and created a trusting, loving relationship with their new family. Ric and Kathy now have legal custody of this young man and speak with such pride of their three sons and the wonderful family they have crafted out of love. Ric Mere and his family are shining examples of the generosity and devotion at-

torneys share with their communities and are a source of pride for #yourLSBA.

**Maria Losavio** was asked by her local court to represent children in certain juvenile law cases (Children in Need of Care or CINC) to ensure that their interests were protected. After being trained as a CINC attorney and serving in that capacity, she became a qualified foster parent so she could foster a family of children who needed to be placed in a safe environment while their mother got the help she needed. Maria agreed and fostered a family of four siblings, providing them with a safe, loving home and keeping them together as a family unit. The court now appoints Maria, by agreement of the parties, as an advocate for children with special needs or unique issues in private divorce or custody matters to make sure the children get the support from the school system and counseling they may need to successfully navigate the emotional litigation. Maria Losavio's dedication to the justice system and selfless commitment of time to help those who have no representation and need it desperately are examples to which we all should strive in #yourLSBA.

Over the next year, I ask each of you to share with me similar actions of lawyers in your local jurisdictions so that I can recognize them this year as I travel around our state. They are our silent

champions who, with every day of practice, represent our profession with grace and dignity. I hope that each story shared will chip away at the negative perception some may have of our profession and begin to build a new admiration for the practice of law and the integral part lawyers play in both our justice system and our communities.

I am so proud and honored to represent this association and its 22,000+ members, and I look forward to meeting as many of you as I can in the next year. I will continue our partnership with the Louisiana Supreme Court and am so appreciative of the support our association receives from our highest court. Not all state bar associations are so fortunate to have that relationship with their Supreme Courts. I look forward to sharing with the state of Louisiana the fine work of our members both inside and outside the courtrooms of our state.

You are champions of justice every day you walk into your offices, with every client you meet, every piece of advice you share and every argument you make. I am honored to count myself amongst your numbers and look forward to championing your efforts every day of my tenure as your president.

*Dona Renegar*