

Project Summaries

Austin Bar Association People's Law School: A Step-by-Step Guide

In February 2007, Austin Bar Association will host its 13th People's Law School event, which provides free legal information on about 30 general interest topics. Austin Bar's People's Law School Committee begins meeting in September to plan the February event. More than 45 "courses" are offered at PLS, which begins at 8:30 with an orientation and ends at 1 p.m. with a tour of the UT Law library. PLS is held at The UT Law School campus, which donates the use of their classrooms. Virtually every aspect of the project is donated as well, including advertisements in local papers, printing of flyers and brochures, coffee and refreshments for attendees, security, and more. Lawyers volunteer to "teach" each class and UT Law School students volunteer to assist committee members the day of the event. Annual budget for event is \$2,500.

Below is a rough planning guide for producing a People's Law School. For more information, contact Kat Hinson, Austin Bar Association Communications Director, (512)472-0279.

SEPT: Begin meeting, confirming committee assignments, review last year's lessons-learned. Contact UT about use of the space/volunteers. Contact security volunteers.

OCT: Contact and secure volunteer speakers. Arrange for sign-language interpreters. Contact volunteers/donors for food.

DEC: Create and arrange for free advertisements including Statesman, Chronicle and street banners. Finalize courses and times. Contact printer about donating brochures print-

ing. Create outreach list and assign to committee members.

JAN: Create Web page on our site including registration form. Finalize content of brochure and send to printer. Finalize content of flyer. Create outreach e-mail/letter to community organizations and send to outreach committee members. Create and send press release to all local media outlets. Send e-mails to past attendees.

FEB: Finalize sponsors/donors for T-shirts. Design logo and order T-shirts for volunteers. Finalize classrooms for each course. Create check-in forms and evaluation forms. Create day-of maps and course schedule with classrooms. Create day-of signage. Cross fingers.

Austin Adoption Day

For most people, November 17, 2005 was like any other day. But for the 83 children and one adult who were adopted into their forever families, November 17 was the beginning of a new life.

Austin Adoption Day marked the "second birthday" for these children who were once abused or neglected, and the chance to start anew.

Whether they were picking out their very own books at the bookstore, trying their luck at the fish pond, or posing with Cinderella and Geoffrey from Toys R' Us, each child seemed to have a smile plastered to his or her face—and they weren't alone.

The excitement in the air was contagious, spreading to each individual who entered the room

under the brightly-colored balloon arch. Judges, attorneys, and volunteers who witnessed this life-changing day had a certain glow about them.

Judges lead the adoption finalization hearings throughout the day. The judges presented each child with a piece of jewelry—ID bracelets for the boys and heart necklaces for the girls—engraved with their new name and the date of Adoption Day. These special keepsakes were generously donated by Jim Kruger of Kruger’s Diamond Jewelers at Barton Creek Mall.

After each family consummated the adoption, the kids chose a teddy bear from the hundreds donated by the Austin legal community and each family received a basket of goodies donated by Austin-area restaurants, movie theaters, bookstores, and other retailers. They then posed for family portraits on the lawn of Garnder Betts Juvenile Justice Center.

Thanks to a partnership with Reading is Fundamental, families visited a “bookstore” where kids were able to choose books from the hundreds donated by attorneys, girl scouts, and RIF.

Dallas Bar Association In-Town Bench Bar Conference

While most bar associations conduct a Bench Bar Conference out of town each year, for the first time, the Dallas Bar Association conducted a Bench Bar Conference in-town as well.

The genesis of this program came from a judge on the Dallas Bar Association’s Morris Harrell Professionalism Committee. The Judge mentioned that she sees many lawyers who are not

members of the Dallas Bar who are in need of help and knowledge about professionalism and ethics. Why not conduct a Bench Bar Conference in-town for those lawyers since they do not attend the out of town Bench Bar Conference?

So, this program was aimed at the many lawyers who are not members of the Dallas Bar Association who do not have the opportunity to take part in the traditional Bench Bar Conference or traditional CLE programs, or the camaraderie of the Bar Association.

The program was organized by the Task Force on Professionalism compiled of lawyers from many practice areas, in various stages of their careers and judges as well. A list of non Dallas Bar Association members was obtained from the State Bar of Texas and those lawyers were sent a brochure about the program. The program was a full day program with one-half day aimed at the civil practitioners and the civil courthouse. The second half took part at the criminal courthouse and targeted criminal practitioners.

The conference included basic CLE on ethics and professionalism. There was a panel made up of judges focusing on practical professional tips for the courthouse lawyers and another that emphasized what all lawyers should know. Small breakout discussions highlighting the guidelines of the Lawyers Creed were facilitated by judges.

Expenditures for this conference were minimal, \$2,500 to cover light snacks and mailings.

The program proved successful with positive feedback from attendees. The Dallas Bar was pleased with the opportunity to engage non-members while offering a service to members.