

STATE BAR *of* TEXAS

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

March 5, 2009

Legislative Update — The Texas Legislature is in full swing and the State Bar is keeping members informed about proposed legislation through its free e-newsletter, *The Friday Update*. Among the bills we are tracking is SB 992, by Senator Robert Duncan (R-Lubbock), which would reorganize the Texas judicial system. (For a summary of the bill's contents, see the Feb. 27 issue of *The Friday Update*, which is available at www.texasbar.com/fridayupdate.) In 2007, after a different court reorganization bill filed by Duncan failed to pass, the State Bar appointed a Court Administration Task Force to study the proposed bill and related issues. The task force, which consisted of more than 50 members (including judges, lawyers, legislators, and public members), issued its report in October 2008. Several of the task force's recommendations are similar to proposals in SB 992. The State Bar has not taken a position on the bill. In other legislative news, Senator Rodney Ellis (D-Houston) has filed SB 1091, which would establish an office of capital writs. The State Bar Board of Directors voted to support that legislation.

Access to Justice Update — The Texas Access to Justice Commission, Texas Access to Justice Foundation, and Texas Supreme Court have been busy educating lawyers, legislators, and the public about the crisis in funding for legal services to the poor. Interest on lawyers' trust accounts, which is used to support legal services, has declined sharply because of reduced interest rates. In 2007, IOLTA revenue had been projected to reach \$28 million. In 2008, it fell to \$12 million. This year, it is projected to total only \$1.5 million. Justice Harriet O'Neill, Rep. Pete Gallego (who serves on the TAJF board), and ATJ Commission Chair Jim Sales held a press conference to discuss the funding crisis. In other access to justice news, the Fellows of the American Bar Foundation presented Jim Sales with its 2009 Outstanding Service Award. Also, the Texas Access to Justice Foundation is planning a 25th anniversary gala, which will take place on May 27 at the new AT&T Executive Education and Conference Center on the campus of the University of Texas at Austin. CNN legal analyst and author Jeffrey Toobin will be the featured speaker.

Workers' Comp Section Sponsors Blood Platelet Drive — On February 16 and 17, State Bar staff and the Workers' Compensation Section sponsored a blood platelet drive at the Texas Law Center for Matthew Sprain. Matthew, the 4-year-old son of section member Michael Sprain, has been diagnosed with aplastic anemia. The University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center supplied six platelet collection machines and was able to register 40 donors and collect 53 platelet credits on Matthew's behalf.

State Bar Pundit — To commemorate the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth, State Bar President Harper Estes wrote an essay, "Lincoln's Legacy," that has appeared as an op-ed in newspapers across the state. Among the papers that have run the article are the *Houston Chronicle*, *San Angelo Standard-Times*, *Baytown Sun*, *New Braunfels Herald Zeitung*, *Polk County Enterprise*, *Hays Free Press*, *Rosebud News*, *Benbrook News*, *Diboll Press*, *Murphy Monitor*, and *Kingsville Record and Bishop News*.

State Bar Blog — The Communications Division has launched *Texas Bar Blog*, which features Texas lawyers and legal professionals, along with news about the bar and profession. The blog also includes a list of blogs by Texas lawyers, and our Twitter, Flickr, and Vimeo feeds. To read the first posts, including a profile of State Bar board member Michelle Cheng, go to <http://blog.texasbar.com>.

State Bar YouTube Contest — The deadline to enter the State Bar's YouTube video contest, "Texans on Justice: Ideals That Unite Us," is March 16. For contest rules, to watch the winning entries from last year's contest, or to watch Harper Estes' call for entries, visit www.texasbar.com/justicefortexas.

Leadership SBOT — The State Bar's first leadership academy will hold its second group meeting this weekend in South Padre Island. Members will present their community service projects at the State Bar Annual Meeting in Dallas, June 25-26. Nominations for next year's class are being accepted.

Resources for Tough Times — The State Bar has resources to help members during these difficult economic times: *Ten Minute Mentor* offers free videos on law practice management and other topics; the Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program offers free, confidential help to those grappling with substance abuse or depression; the Member Benefits program offers discounts on products and services; and a free legal research service, Casemaker, is available on both TexasBar.com (MyBarPage) and TexasBarCLE.com. The State Bar staff has had several meetings to look at ways to save money while providing services to Texas lawyers and ensuring that our justice system remains strong. If you have ideas or suggestions, please email Michelle Hunter at mhunter@texasbar.com.

Nominations Sought — The Child Abuse and Neglect Committee is accepting nominations for the Fairy Davenport Rutland Award for Distinguished Service to Children and Families. Candidates must have made a substantial contribution to the field of advocacy for abused and neglected children. The deadline is April 1. For more information, contact Summer Smith at (512)427-1516.

Resolutions Deadline — Resolutions must be filed at the Texas Law Center by 5 p.m. on April 1 to be considered during the State Bar Annual Meeting in Dallas. Proposed resolutions should be sent in care of the State Bar Executive Director, P.O. Box 12487, Austin 78711-2487. Questions should be directed to Candiss Held, Officer/Director Services, or call (800)204-2222, Ext. 1416.

And They're Off! — State Bar president-elect candidates Rhonda Hunter and Terry Tottenham and TYLA president-elect candidates Jennifer Evans Morris and Clay Scheitzach have started their campaigns. Voting will take place April 1-30. For more information, visit www.texasbar.com/election.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the State Bar of Texas is to support the administration of the legal system, assure all citizens equal access to justice, foster high standards of ethical conduct for lawyers, support and provide services to its members, enable its members to better serve their clients and the public, and educate the public about the rule of law and promote diversity in the administration of justice and the practice of law.

