



QUESTIONS FOR THE CANDIDATES



Amber James



C. Barrett Thomas

The following interview with TYLA president-elect candidates **Amber James** of Odessa and **C. Barrett Thomas** of Sweetwater is included to educate young lawyers as they prepare to vote. Their biographies were featured in the March issue (p. 272) and are available on the State Bar website at texasbar.com/elections. Votes for TYLA president-elect and district directors can be cast via paper ballot or online from April 1 to April 30, 2014. Attorneys eligible to vote will be mailed an election packet that includes a paper ballot. The deadline to cast ballots is 5 p.m. CST on April 30.

WHY DO YOU WANT TO SERVE AS PRESIDENT OF THE TEXAS YOUNG LAWYERS ASSOCIATION?

JAMES

I want to be president because I see an opportunity for TYLA to increase its influence and impact on young lawyers in Texas, and I truly believe that my diverse perspective as a first-generation college graduate who has practiced both in the largest city in Texas and in one of the remote areas of the state makes me uniquely qualified for the job.

Many young lawyers in Texas don't fully understand the role of TYLA or all of the purposeful work it does throughout the state. Even just a few years ago while I was learning to become a lawyer, I wasn't completely sure of TYLA's purpose or what it was busy doing. We must do a better job of being an organization of inclusion, and the best way to do that is to refocus our collective efforts on meeting the *needs* of our young lawyer membership—both those who participate in local affiliates and those who don't. For me, leading TYLA will be about capitalizing on our organization's greatest strengths—its people, projects, and resources—and then finding new ways to ensure that those efforts impact more of our members.

THOMAS

I have served this organization in almost every capacity—from being a local affiliate member and president to being a member of TYLA's Executive Committee. In that time, I have worked alongside attorneys from all over the state, writing wills for veterans and first responders, stocking food banks, training police officers, visiting children's homes, and more. I have witnessed firsthand the power TYLA has to change lives for the better. I am convinced that no other organization provides such a unique opportunity to serve both the members of our own profession and those in need around us.

My faith has always called me to public service. It is my passion and the reason I find such fulfillment in the work of TYLA. The leader of TYLA should not just casually accept TYLA's mission but rather should be driven from the heart to want to improve the lives of fellow attorneys and to assist those in need who cross his or her path. I have that heart and that passion. More importantly, I have the ability forged through experience to lead this organization and continue the great tradition of excellence in public service that people have come to expect from TYLA.

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES FACING YOUNG LAWYERS IN TEXAS AND WHAT ROLE SHOULD TYLA PLAY IN ADDRESSING THEM?

JAMES

Job/Career Satisfaction. With lower starting salaries, over-saturation of the job market, and mounting law school debt eroding job and career satisfaction, TYLA can support young lawyers by revealing the realities of law practice early and often. TYLA should work to promote better

understanding of the current job market and help funnel young lawyers to the areas of greatest demand. TYLA also should take the lead in providing more opportunities for young lawyers to develop supportive networks (grouped by region or practice area) and fostering more options for service.

Availability of Effective Mentorships. TYLA should focus on developing relationships between our young lawyers and suitable mentors from both our own membership and with more senior members of the State Bar.

Access to Resources for New Lawyers. Both of the aforementioned problems demand that TYLA take the lead on developing and providing resources to help young lawyers build and improve their practices.

THOMAS

Young lawyers are facing more issues than just three, and I know TYLA has the talent and resources to take them on simultaneously. However, if I have to choose, I would say our greatest challenges are the economic environment, limited opportunity for professional development, and an increasingly punitive professional environment.

While the economy is arguably improving, there are still more lawyers than there are jobs. TYLA should work to provide avenues for job seekers to gain experience and improve their resumes while searching for long-term employment—possibly through legal-based volunteer work. It should also expend resources to host events that would put job seekers directly in contact with employers. TYLA should attempt to provide a statewide network of mentors for those who strike out on their own, whether by choice or necessity, to ensure new attorneys have adequate guidance to avoid novice mistakes that lead to grievances and/or sanctions.

WHICH TYLA PROJECT OR PROGRAM THAT YOU HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN HAS BEEN THE MOST FULFILLING TO YOU AND WHY?

JAMES

Without a doubt, my work with TYLA's *Generation Generosity* project has been the most fulfilling. I became a lawyer to serve people; in fact, my entire concept of what it means to be a lawyer came from observing lawyers in and around my hometown who led the charge in community and civic pursuits. As lawyers (and as people), we are at our best when we are giving back to our own communities.

The TYLA board has done a GG project in each city in which we've had a meeting this year, but for me, our work at the Children's Home of Lubbock was the best. By spending an afternoon playing games with those kids, we demonstrated to them that regardless of their circumstance, they have value to us and to society as a whole. It reminded me that giving of yourself (and your time) is perhaps the most important way we serve others.

THOMAS

I created and co-authored a project named *Remaining*

Civil: An Officer's Guide to Responding to Non-Criminal Calls for Service. *Remaining Civil* is the result of countless questions I received from officers asking whether they could enforce various child custody orders. Ultimately, the project grew into an informational pamphlet and training block designed to teach officers to effectively respond to a host of non-criminal calls for service, ranging from evictions and domestic disputes to mental commitments and more.

Remaining Civil has had a profound impact on law enforcement agencies across the state and changed how they define and respond to both criminal and civil calls for service. Law enforcement administrators have reported a more effective police force and fewer officer grievances in some jurisdictions. It gives me great pride to see the project spreading to even more agencies across the state this year.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE?

JAMES

My leadership style is more participative than directive, more *enabling* than performing. It tends to be adaptive and responsive to changing circumstances yet bolstered by consistent energy, effort, and attention, as well as a clear vision.

Fundamentally, leadership is about understanding people and getting them to work together to accomplish a task. As a leader, I'm at my best when I communicate a clear vision and then allow my team the freedom to use their own ideas and initiative to accomplish the many tasks needed to achieve that vision. My focus is on getting the very best from each member of my team—and then leveraging that massive human potential to facilitate the larger vision of the group.

Finally, leadership requires integrity, dedication of purpose, knowledge, and—perhaps most important—selflessness. For me, that means my leadership is less about a position and more about performance.

THOMAS

Growing up in a big family, I learned the value of effective communication and consistent encouragement. I learned to respect all ideas and to incorporate differences as strengths rather than isolate them as weaknesses. Based on those lessons, I have tried to become a peacemaker, an encourager, and one willing to get my hands dirty and lead by example.

TYLA consists of nearly 27,000 educated and driven professionals who are already leaders in their own right. The membership of TYLA doesn't need anyone to tell it what to do or how to do something. The members simply need someone to identify their combined interests, unify their efforts on a collaborative front, and encourage them to achieve the greatness they've already proven themselves capable of individually. I believe I can be that person and that this organization is limited only by how much its members will dream they can accomplish together.

HOW DO YOU BALANCE YOUR PERSONAL LIFE WITH YOUR PROFESSIONAL LIFE?

JAMES

Truly great lawyers treat their practice with a certain reverence that drives them to achieve within the profession or in their job. For me, the same type of reverence is required for success in personal life. Instead of focusing on client satisfaction, zealous advocacy, and billing, my focus turns to family, friends, travel, outdoor pursuits, painting, writing, napping—pretty much anything that cultivates the whole of me. At the end of the day, I know that I am a better lawyer, better law partner, and better leader because I have developed a true reverence for my *whole* life—not just my work life.

THOMAS

My wife and I are both trial attorneys and active with our church, several charitable and professional organizations, and our four children's scholastic and sporting events. I know we are not alone. Most attorneys are equally busy and maintaining balance is critical to us all.

My father used to quote from *The Little Prince*. He would say, "It is the time you spend on your rose that makes your rose so important." He was right. We must find time to invest in our families, churches, communities, and ourselves. It really is the *other things*, aside from our practice, that make our lives rich. I think the way to balance is merely to make balance a priority. For my wife and I, that has meant a commitment to family dinners together, Saturday morning cartoons and doughnuts, and late night workouts. Of course, sometimes we turn to Starbucks for help. **TBJ**



The TYLA Board of Directors has elected the following officers for 2014-2015:

Priscilla Camacho, chair-elect of the board;
Sam Houston, vice president;
Baili Rhodes, secretary; and
John Shaw, treasurer.

Dustin M. Howell will serve as chair of the board.



CAMACHO HOUSTON RHODES SHAW

CONGRATULATIONS!