



# MUSIC IN THE AIR

Which of these best describes Austin attorney **Laura LaValle**: (A) environmental lawyer, (B) former military officer, (C) talented musician, or (D) all of the above? If you aren't sure, feel free to phone a friend. If "D" is your final answer, you are correct.

"I wanted to be a pianist before I ever considered becoming a lawyer," says LaValle, who is managing principal and co-founder of Beveridge & Diamond's Texas office, as well as co-chair of the firm's Air Practice Group. "I majored in piano performance at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music my first two years of college. When spending four to six hours a day in a practice room and aspects of conservatory life began to take the joy out of playing the piano, I decided not to major in music."

That's when LaValle transferred to Duke University, where she got a degree in political science. Next she earned her law degree from the University of Florida College of Law.

"After law school I joined the U.S. Air Force, where I served as a judge advocate for six years," LaValle says. "A significant part of my job was to act as prosecutor in courts martial and to represent the Air Force in various types of administrative proceedings." She also provided counsel on environmental issues and assistance with environmental audits of Air Force bases. With assignments in Denver, Austin, and Colorado Springs, her assignment to Bergstrom Air Force Base is how she discovered the city she now calls home.

When she moved back to Austin in 1994 upon departing the Air Force, LaValle landed a job at the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission as an air attorney. To get involved in the legal community, she volunteered to play the piano for the local bar association's annual Bar and Grill Show, then performed at the historic Paramount Theater.

LaValle also became the pianist for The Bar and Grill Singers, a group of Austin attorneys who spoof lawyers and the legal profession by changing the lyrics to well-known songs. Through performances and CD sales, they raise money for volunteer legal services for the indigent. LaValle has performed with the group in numerous cities throughout Texas and across the country. "A breakthrough performance that provided significant national exposure and led to some of our first out-of-state gigs was at the American Bar Association's annual conference in San Antonio years ago," LaValle says.

Over time Laura began singing with the group in addition to playing the piano. She characterizes herself as "an adequate back-



Laura LaValle with her dog Fiona. LaValle, an environmental attorney in Austin, majored in piano performance at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music her first two years of college.

up singer," quipping that her only vocal solo to date is a spoken punchline in which she asks God if she can take her BlackBerry with her to heaven.

What does LaValle like most about performing? "I feel so fortunate to be able to use music to make people laugh, raise money for a good cause, and have a great time with friends — all at the same time! The interaction with audiences laughing at punch lines in the lyrics and appreciating our offbeat humor is pretty amazing." ✨





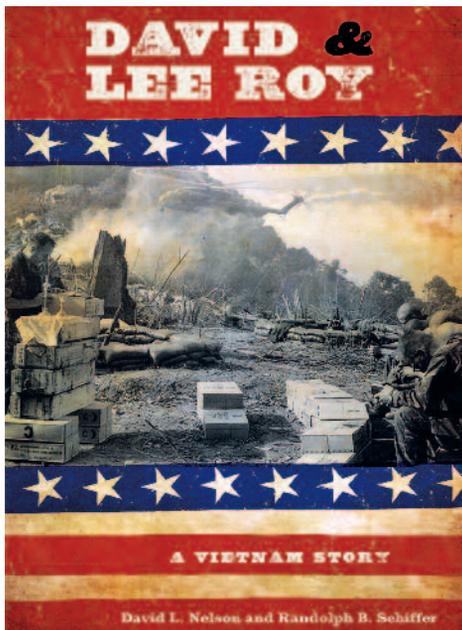
## Two Texas Boys, Two Different Paths

**D**avid Nelson and Lee Roy Herron grew up together — attending junior high, high school, and Texas Tech University side by side. But in the midst of the tumultuous 1960s, the lives of the two Lubbock boys veered toward different paths: Nelson went to law school and then the Judge Advocate General’s Corp (JAG). Herron volunteered for the front lines of Vietnam, where he was killed in 1969. It was almost 30 years later before Nelson discovered there was more to the story.

Nelson, a Houston attorney, is now telling their story. Along with Randolph B. Schiffer, he has written a book, *David and Lee Roy: A Vietnam Story*, that is slated to be published by Texas Tech University Press in the fall.

“It all started way back in college. Lee Roy talked me into joining Marine Corps officer training,” Nelson says. “He volunteered to go to Vietnam as a translator and interrogator. When he was there, he took the place of a wounded officer and was killed. That was all I knew from 1969 to 1997.”

Then, in 1997, Nelson happened to hear retired U.S. Marine Col. and Medal of Honor recipient Wesley L. Fox speak at a benefit. He recounted the battle where he had won his medal of



Houston attorney David Nelson’s book, *David and Lee Roy: A Vietnam Story*.

honor and mentioned another Marine who had acted heroically — “a stout young man from West Texas named Lee Herron.”

“I almost fell out of my chair when he said that,” Nelson says. “For the first time, I put two and two together. It turns out that Lee Roy had not died needlessly. He had taken a wounded officer’s platoon to destroy two machine gun bunkers. He single-handedly destroyed the first one, but was caught in the open before he could get the second one.” Herron was posthumously awarded the the nation’s second highest award of valor — the Navy Cross. Col. Fox wrote the citation himself.

After uncovering the story of Herron’s death, Nelson wanted to honor his fallen friend. With the help of former classmates, he set up

a scholarship at Texas Tech University in Herron’s name and held a ceremony to publically honor Herron. Nelson didn’t stop there. He teamed up with Randolph Schiffer (who, Nelson says “added music to my words”) and wrote *David and Lee Roy*. “I’ve always hoped all along that people will read about Lee Roy and what he did,” Nelson says. “He deserves to be honored and respected.” ✪

## TEXAS PEOPLE



**Tiffany Bingham Briscoe**

Associate, Vorys, Sater, Seymour, and Pease, L.L.P. (Houston)

Briscoe was selected by the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity as a member of its inaugural Fellows Program.



**Graham Hill**

Partner, Locke, Lord, Bissell & Liddell, L.L.P. (Houston)

Hill has become president of the International Society of Barristers, becoming the second Texan in history to lead the organization. He also was inducted into the International Academy of Trial Lawyers.



**Faith S. Johnson**

Private Practitioner (Cedar Hill)

Johnson was reappointed by Gov. Rick Perry to the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas Oversight Committee. Johnson’s term expires Jan. 31, 2017.



**Betty Balli Torres**

Executive Director, Texas Access to Justice Foundation and President, National Association of IOLTA Programs (Austin)

Torres has joined the board of Pro Bono Net, a website that provides resources for pro bono and legal services attorneys.