



State Bar President Bob Black (third from left) and Austin Bar Association volunteers Jim Haley (left) and Katy Andre (second from left) meet with fire victims at the Bastrop disaster response legal clinic.

WILDFIRE DISASTER RELIEF

In 2011, Texas faced its driest and hottest summer on record. It also faced its worst fire season since the 1950s — more than 3.7 million acres have been scorched in wildfires that have plagued the state for the past year. From Fort Davis in West Texas to Longview in East Texas to Bastrop in Central Texas, every corner of the Lone Star State has been affected by wildfires. Fortunately, Texas lawyers have stepped up to help. Here are just a few of the relief efforts Texas attorneys have organized and led.

In Bastrop, site of the worst blaze in the state — the Bastrop County Complex fire, where more than 1,600 homes are lost and more than 34,300 acres have burned — attorneys from the Austin Bar Association and Bastrop County Bar Association staffed relief centers to answer basic legal questions. Austin Bar President **David Chamberlain** appointed **David Courreges**, **Karin Crump**, and **Amy Welborn** as co-chairs of the Central Texas Wildfire Response Team. “We’ve received questions that run the gamut from landlord-tenant issues to insurance and real estate law to questions about people’s pets and about the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA),” Courreges said.

The State Bar of Texas activated its disaster hotline at (800) 504-7030 and updated the disaster resources page it

maintains at texasbar.com/disasterresources. Within days of the Bastrop fire, State Bar President **Bob Black** visited the community to deliver contributions and meet with fire victims and volunteers. State Bar Executive Director **Michelle Hunter** and other attorneys on the State Bar staff assisted with a legal clinic in Smithville.

Other local bar associations around the state also pitched in to assist wildfire victims by collecting donations. The Bell County Bar Association held a donation drive the week of Sept. 19, during the Bell County Bench Bar Conference, for victims of area fires. Houston Bar Association President **Denise Scofield** said that the HBA partnered with the Houston Young Lawyers Association for a donation drive for firefighters and victims of the wildfires.

In rural areas across the state, legal aid offices have offered services to wildfire victims. **Lewis Kinard**, supervising attorney at Lone Star Legal Aid (LSLA) in Houston, said the legal aid office is providing support to its local offices in 76 counties, including Grimes, Waller, and Montgomery counties. These outreach efforts have been staffed by LSLA staff, but Kinard says there is a large need for volunteer attorneys, especially in Waller County.



Another difficulty LSLA has faced has been the vast area they are covering: LSLA has been unable to hold clinics because there are so few victims in any one area. “This disaster has been different from others such as hurricanes, because people are gone. When their homes are burned to ashes, they aren’t usually hanging around,” Kinard said. “This response is definitely challenging our traditional disaster relief methods because hurricane and fire responses are different.”

One thing Courreges, Kinard, and Scofield anticipate is that the need for legal aid will increase in the months to come. “We do know from previous disasters that people need to take care of their human needs first — food, clothing, shelter,” Scofield said. “What will come next are their legal needs, but there will be some lag time before they figure out what legal issues they need to address.”

Courreges says he hopes that the relief efforts throughout the state will encourage pro bono volunteers in less disastrous times. “It’s great that we are getting such a great response during this tragedy,” he said. “I hope that this reminds attorneys throughout the state of the great satisfaction of helping and that they take that to their local legal aid office. There is always a need for legal help.” ❖



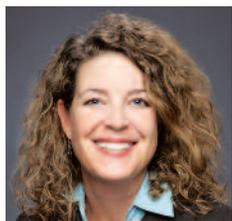
The Houston Bar Association and Houston Young Lawyers Association set up a donation drive to benefit firefighters and other frontline responders in counties surrounding Houston by collecting items such as water, lip balm, and high-protein snacks.



The Austin Bar Association has been offering legal advice Monday through Friday in the Bastrop area since Sept. 6.

During the recent wave of wildfire disasters affecting Texas, the State Bar activated its disaster hotline at (800) 504-7030 and updated the disaster resources page it maintains with fire-relief resources for attorneys and the public. For more information about relief efforts in your area or ways that you can get involved, including links to resources and ways to make donations, please visit texasbar.com/disasterresources.

TEXAS PEOPLE



Jeanne C. “Cezy” Collins
*Partner in Kemp Smith, L.L.P.,
El Paso*

Elected president of the National Conference of Women’s Bar Associations, an organization of women’s bar associations that represents about 35,000 women lawyers.



David C. Garza
*Member in Garza & Garza,
L.L.P., Brownsville*

Reappointed by Gov. Rick Perry to the Texas Commission on the Arts, which acts in an advisory capacity regarding state buildings and works of art. Garza’s term expires Aug. 31, 2017.



William “Mick” McKamie
*Co-founder of McKamie
Krueger, L.L.P., San Antonio*

Honored with the Marvin J. Glink Private Practice Local Government Attorney Award from the International Municipal Lawyers Association for his commitment to his community and profession.



A. Martin Wickliff, Jr.
*Member in Cozen O’Connor,
Houston*

Received the 2011 Trailblazer Outside Counsel of the Year Award at the State Bar’s Texas Minority Counsel Program for promoting diversity within the legal profession.