



## LAW STUDENT BY DAY,

*Miss Texas By Night*

It has been a busy last few months for 3L DaNae Couch. The Texas Tech University School of Law student was named Miss Texas in July and has since made dozens of media appearances, moved into a new place, traveled across the country to make presentations to children, and thrown a first pitch at a Texas Rangers game. “It’s been a whirlwind of activity,” Couch says. “But, it’s been exhilarating and fun as well.”

For any student, juggling the rigors of law school, the demands of personal relationships, and extracurricular activities can be difficult. But for Couch, it has been all about planning. “I plan things down to the half hour,” she says. “I’ve wanted to be a lawyer since I was a kid, so it was important that I attend law school and do well while I handle all of the extracurricular stuff just as well.”

Couch, who participated on the school’s national mock trial team and served as an editor for the school’s *Estate Planning & Community Property Journal*, says that she sat out fall pageants to focus on law school. That was hard for her, as she is used to participating in so many activities. “Handling law school pressures and preparing for competitions was really hard,” she says. “To just focus on school was a change for me, so I kept practicing my talent, baton twirling, and continued my workouts. I wanted to make sure that I could have a ‘normal’ life.”

Normal for Couch now includes traveling the state to help raise awareness about addiction — her platform is “Hope for Family Recovery: Life Beyond Addiction” — speaking to children about goal setting and problem solving, and continuing her workout and talent regimens.



DaNae Couch, a 3L at Texas Tech University School of Law, was named Miss Texas in July. She will take a year off from law school to represent Texas and to compete for the title of Miss America in January.

Couch, an aspiring litigator, says competing in pageants has been a good primer for her legal career. “You are thrown into new environments all of the time and you have to think on your feet,” she says. “You also have to win people over and endear them to you. I see closing arguments as being similar. I think it is helping me hone my advocacy skills.”

Couch will take off this year from law school and return for the 2013–14 year. Unless, of course, she is crowned Miss America on Jan. 12, 2013. — P.G.



# MR. DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

There are patriots and then there are great patriots: the latter is **Robb Fickman** of Houston. Fickman is the kind of spirited American that the 56 Founding Fathers who signed the Declaration of Independence would have looked for if another signer had been needed. Indeed, had he been around in 1776 and been asked, he most certainly would have signed the great document of liberty notwithstanding the risk in doing so.

To Fickman, the Fourth of July has always been about more than sharing barbecue with friends or watching fireworks with family. To him, the Fourth of July is a time to celebrate our freedoms and our military, past and present. It is a time to appreciate our unalienable rights and honor the courage of those who secured those rights for us.

Three years ago, Fickman had the idea that Houston's criminal defense lawyers should read the Declaration of Independence on the courthouse steps as a public reminder that we are the home of the free *because* of the brave — and that freedom was not free. He put the task before the Harris County Criminal Lawyers Association and they accepted the challenge. The group of approximately 20 attorneys met on July 2, 2010, and a new celebration of liberty was born. To all who read from the document, it was fun,

moving, and inspirational. Indeed, all of the readers promised they would follow suit the next year. In 2011, the Harris County reading group swelled to more than 100 attorneys and the readings spread through the Texas Criminal Defense

Lawyers Association to more than 20 courthouses across the state. This was thanks to the hard work of Fickman, who called, emailed, and faxed others to join him in honoring the Founding Fathers. The result was a noticeable wave of pride in our country.

For 2012, Fickman thought the project could go bigger. Over the course of a year, he persuaded criminal defense lawyers across the country to gather in groups and read the Declaration of Independence at their own courthouses. On July 2–3, Fickman was rewarded with the news that 12 states (Alabama, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Georgia, Kansas, Michigan, Mississippi, New Mexico, South Carolina, Texas, and Utah) as well as

the District of Columbia, had joined him in reading the Declaration of Independence.

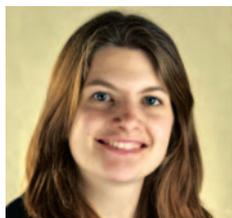
July 4, 2013, is in Fickman's sights. His mission is 25 states. Interested in supporting this project? Take five minutes to look up and read the Declaration of Independence. Let it inspire you year-round!

— *J. Gary Trichter, Bandera*



*Houston attorney Robb Fickman reads the Declaration of Independence.*

## TEXAS PEOPLE



**Maria-Vittoria "Giugi" Carminati**  
Associate, Weil, Gotshal & Manges, L.L.P., Houston

Appointed vice chair of the International Arbitration Committee of the American Bar Association Section of International Law.



**Patrick Maher**  
Partner, Shannon, Gracey, Ratliff & Miller, L.L.P., Fort Worth

Appointed by the State Bar of Texas President to serve as the 2012–13 chair of the State Bar's Council of Section Chairs.



**E.G. "Gerry" Morris**  
The Law Office of E.G. Morris, Austin

Received the 2012 Diane Lip-ton Award for Outstanding Educational Advocacy from the Council of Parent Attor-neys and Advocates.



**Dietrich M. von Biedenfeld**  
Contract administrator, San Jacinto College District, West Columbia

Appointed by Gov. Rick Perry to the Texas Council on Purchasing from People with Dis-abilities for a term to expire Jan. 31, 2017.