



A Tribute to **AN INNOVATOR**

JOHN SIRMAN IS ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO HAS BEEN AROUND FOR SO LONG, and his presence is so steady, that you can begin to take him for granted. Whenever you pause just a second to consider it, though, you realize how much he is part of the very fabric of our State Bar.

John has been an editorial assistant and an interim executive director—and a lot of things in between—during his more than 25 years on the staff of the State Bar of Texas.



SIRMAN

Largely because of John, our State Bar was an early adopter and pioneer in incorporating digital communications such as blogging, online communities, and social media into bar activities. Always forward-thinking, John for many years has led our strategic planning efforts to ensure the State Bar continues to innovate in all that we do. And he has been a leader not only in Texas, but also at the national level with the National Association of Bar Executives.

John's history with the State Bar of Texas dates to 1991, when he worked as an editorial assistant before deciding to attend law school. He earned his J.D. from Texas Tech University School of Law in 1996 and came back to the State Bar as a part-time law clerk later that year. He has been with us ever since, sharing his many talents for the betterment of the legal profession and the benefit of the public we serve.

If you know John, you know he's not someone who seeks attention. He'd much rather serve, unnoticed, in the background. So, for me to publicly brag on him, there must be a good reason. There is: John recently let me know the time has come for him to retire from the State Bar and pursue other interests. He plans to stay on with us until the end of the calendar year to ensure a smooth transition.

Of course, we are sorry to see him go. His impact on the bar has been profound.

John has been associate editor and department manager of the *Texas Bar Journal*, website manager, legal counsel, and—most recently—both associate executive director/legal counsel and executive editor of this publication. When Michelle Hunter retired and the executive director's position opened in 2017, it was John to whom the State Bar Board of Directors looked to serve as interim executive director. He ably served in that role until I was hired as executive director in December 2017 and has been by my side every day since, providing encouragement, friendship, and solid counsel.

Thank you, John, for your tremendous service to the legal profession.

Staffing Changes

John's pending departure created an opening for Chris Ritter to join Brad Johnson in the State Bar legal counsel's office as in-house counsel. Since November 2018, Chris has served as director of the Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program, where he has helped countless lawyers dealing with substance use or other mental health issues. Before he joined the TLAP staff in 2014, Chris spent almost 16 years as a civil trial lawyer with significant experience representing and advising governmental entities. We are fortunate to have Chris on our legal team.



RITTER



GRIGG

I'm also pleased to report that TLAP's lead professional, Erica Grigg, has been promoted to fill the TLAP director role. Before joining the TLAP staff in 2018, Erica served as a volunteer for the program for nine years. She was a litigation attorney at Spivey & Grigg in Austin focusing on civil rights and personal injury law. Erica is well known and respected across the legal community, and I know she will do an excellent job in this new position.

Sincerely,

TREY APFFEL

Executive Director, State Bar of Texas
Editor-in-Chief, *Texas Bar Journal*