

# SOLACE:

More Than 5,000 Legal Professionals  
in the Network to Assist Colleagues



**R**ealizing that some Louisiana attorneys and legal professionals facing difficult personal tragedies often had limited access to, and limited knowledge of, assistance avenues, and realizing that many other Louisiana attorneys and legal professionals had vast resources of compassion and contacts, New Orleans attorney Mark C. Surprenant and U.S. District Court Judge Jay C. Zainey developed a concept. That concept became the SOLACE program — an acronym for Support of Lawyers/Legal Personnel, All Concern Encouraged. The program began operation on Oct. 28, 2002, with a few attorneys and legal professionals forming the initial assistance network.

Now, just over seven years later, that network has grown to more than 5,000 legal professionals, all quickly accessible by e-mail. To date, the network has assisted more than 500 individuals and families. That assistance can come in the form of a condolence card to the grieving family of a deceased attorney to immediate air transportation for an attorney needing to get to a hospital out-of-state for a life-saving organ transplant. The speed at which these requests for assistance are filled is amazing — answers can come in a few minutes, a few hours or a few days. SOLACE was particularly instrumental in assisting attorneys who were displaced as a result of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Gustav and Ike in finding housing, office space, office furniture and books.

SOLACE is a Louisiana State Bar Association program, under the purview of the LSBA/Louisiana Bar

Foundation's Community Action Committee.

To request assistance, contact Judge Zainey at [Jay\\_Zainey@laed.uscourts.gov](mailto:Jay_Zainey@laed.uscourts.gov) or any of the other SOLACE area coordinators established throughout Louisiana. See the SOLACE contacts box on page 234. Or go to the LSBA's Web site and complete the online form: [www.lsba.org/2007InsideLSBA/solace.asp](http://www.lsba.org/2007InsideLSBA/solace.asp).

To become part of the SOLACE assistance network, e-mail Zainey at [Jay\\_Zainey@laed.uscourts.gov](mailto:Jay_Zainey@laed.uscourts.gov) or Surprenant at [mark.surprenant@arlaw.com](mailto:mark.surprenant@arlaw.com).

Surprenant, senior partner in charge of the New Orleans office of Adams and Reese, L.L.P., has been dedicated to community service since the beginning of his career. Before co-founding SOLACE in 2002, he created HUGS, his firm's corporate philanthropy program, in 1988, and CA&RE, his firm's official pro bono program, in 2000.

Since co-founding SOLACE, Zainey, appointed by President George W. Bush to the United States District Court, Eastern District of Louisiana, in February 2002, has gone on to organize the Homeless Experience Legal Protection (H.E.L.P.) program in 2004. Through this program, attorneys provide legal consultation services and notary services at homeless centers in several Louisiana cities and in several other states.

To read exactly how SOLACE has helped, and continues to help, read Judge Zainey's article below. To read how SOLACE is appreciated by those who are assisted, read the success story on page 235.

# WHAT IF...You Needed Assistance from SOLACE?

By Judge Jay C. Zainey

**WHAT IF. . .** You are a solo practitioner and you lost your office in a fire. What would you do? How soon could you obtain (and afford) office furniture and office space to get you back on track? Wouldn't it be nice if you could send out an e-mail and within two days have all of your professional needs met?

**WHAT IF. . .** You have been diagnosed with cancer and have been instructed to report to M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston. You have been told that you will need to be in Houston for four months while undergoing outpatient chemotherapy. Where would you stay? How could you afford it?

**WHAT IF. . .** Your spouse was diagnosed with a very rare syndrome as a result of alcohol abuse, and you are told by your physician that there are no resources in Louisiana to assist you and your spouse. How would you find out where to go? How could you gain admission?

The above "what ifs" are real examples of situations that our fellow attorneys have faced. Here is how members of our legal profession responded.

**#1:** Once the solo practitioner who lost everything in the fire contacted SOLACE, an e-mail went out to the SOLACE membership at 6:18 p.m. on a Saturday night asking for assistance. The lawyer in need sent the following message Monday evening, two days later: "The responses and offers of assistance from attorneys and judges have been overwhelming and I am happy to announce that all of my computer and furniture needs have been met. I even had a female attorney in Shreveport ask for my address so she could send a gift card for an office supply store."

**#2:** An e-mail went out to the members of SOLACE at 11:58 p.m., requesting housing in Houston for a period of four months for the young SOLACE member

undergoing treatment for cancer. The following response was received eight and a half hours later, at 8:35 a.m.: "One of my good friends and Houston attorney... has come to the rescue for the patient below.... Ed's wife is a physician and both of them go above and beyond 'giving back.' When I read your note, I knew Ed would help. He will contact the patient directly."

**#3:** Within 24 hours of the date and time that the request for information about the rare syndrome was circulated to the SOLACE members, a SOLACE member had made arrangements for the family in need to receive a consultation (and follow-up treatment) at the Mayo Clinic.

We are truly members of an honorable profession. Of course, many of us are adversaries in court. But out of court, there are more than 5,000 members of our Louisiana legal community who have volunteered to keep their eyes and ears open and to let us know when we can help fellow members of our profession who are experiencing a hardship. Think about it: If each of us has a circle of 10 friends, family members and clients who we can call upon for information, we will have a network of approximately 42,000 people who are potentially available to address any issue that we face. This is what the SOLACE Program — an acronym for Support of Lawyers/Legal Personnel, All Concern Encouraged — is all about. The brainchild of New Orleans attorney Mark C. Surprenant, SOLACE is a Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA) program and under the purview of the LSBA/Louisiana Bar Foundation's Community Action Committee. The sole purpose of the SOLACE program is for legal professionals to reach out in small, but meaningful and compassionate ways to judges, lawyers, court personnel, paralegals, legal secretaries and their families who need our help.

There is nothing too big or too small that our fellow attorneys and legal professionals are willing to do for each other. There

are many examples of instances in which members of our legal community assisted each other in their times of need.

## There's Nothing Too Big

In addition to the examples above, we have had two instances in which spouses of attorneys suffered from very rare syndromes in which no physician in Louisiana could assist. A SOLACE member in Baton Rouge contacted John Finan, former CEO of Our Lady of the Lake Hospital. Finan assisted in both of these cases and was able to identify specialists at the Mayo Clinic who could assist these individuals. Finan then made arrangements for both women to be admitted to the Mayo Clinic. There was another instance in which the child of a young attorney and his wife was a patient at Johns Hopkins. The family's bill, over and above insurance, was in excess of \$50,000. Although SOLACE cannot solicit funds, it sent out a blast e-mail and asked if anyone had contacts at Johns Hopkins who could assist with the bill. Subsequently, a number of our SOLACE members were able to identify resources for this family and, through contacts they had at Johns Hopkins and again with the support of Finan, our SOLACE members were able to get some financial relief from Johns Hopkins for the family in need.

We have a number of fellow attorneys who are pilots and have offered to provide free air transportation to members of our legal community in need of transportation for medical issues. There was one instance in which an attorney from southwest Louisiana needed a liver transplant at Ochsner Hospital in New Orleans, but he couldn't survive the drive. A SOLACE member provided air transportation for our attorney in need. The attorney's wife and child wanted to stay near him during his surgery and recuperation period. The family had an RV and needed a place to park it. Again, a request was circulated to more than 5,000 members around the state and, within minutes, an attorney from

Ponchatoula contacted SOLACE and offered a lot in a trailer park that he owned near the hospital to the family, free of charge.

This is what attorneys do for each other during their time of need. The list goes on and on.

### There's Nothing Too Small

One evening I met an attorney and his wife at a local restaurant. They had just returned from an extended stay at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center where the attorney recently had a leg amputated. I told them about the SOLACE program and asked them if our fellow members in the legal community could assist them in any way. The attorney was gracious and stated that they had no real needs; their children were grown and out of the house so they didn't need assistance getting the children to school, household chores, grocery shopping or any of the other things that SOLACE members and their families

have provided for each other. However, after giving it much thought, the spouse of the attorney said that she had a "little" request. She stated that they have a dog who is like a member of their family and it is upsetting when they have to board the animal for two weeks at a time while the husband undergoes chemotherapy in Houston. Within minutes of the time the request was circulated to the SOLACE members, more than 70 people responded and stated that they would be more than happy to board the dog — at no expense to the family in need.

LSBA Immediate Past President Elizabeth Erny Foote said, "In the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the SOLACE network was activated to recruit volunteers and services to help the LSBA with its organized relief efforts. When we needed someone to help a displaced New Orleans legal services attorney to set up his computer in Shreveport so that he could continue to serve his population, we just sent out an e-mail to SOLACE and

someone was there the next day. For the public relief effort, SOLACE recruited volunteers to man the FEMA disaster relief centers and the Red Cross shelters, providing immediate legal assistance to desperate people. For the lawyers' relief efforts, SOLACE filled any number of needs — from finding volunteers to unload, store and distribute a truckload of donated office furniture to sending a cash donation to a stranded fellow attorney who found herself several days after the storm displaced without any money, clothes or transportation. In the months after the storm, I received several e-mails every day with needs that I just forwarded on to SOLACE. As if by magic — or, more accurately, by a benign hurricane of energy and goodwill — these needs were met. I am very proud to be a lawyer and to be a member of this great community."

SOLACE asks LSBA members to do two things:

First, please be our eyes and ears. It costs you nothing. Let us know if you hear

## SOLACE /Support of Lawyers/Legal Personnel — All Concern Encouraged

*The Louisiana State Bar Association/Louisiana Bar Foundation's Community Action Committee supports the SOLACE program. Through the program, the state's legal community is able to reach out in small, but meaningful and compassionate ways to judges, lawyers, court personnel, paralegals, legal secretaries and their families who experience a death or catastrophic illness, sickness or injury. For assistance, contact a coordinator.*

Area	Coordinator	Phone	E-mail
Alexandria Area	Elizabeth Erny Foote	(318)445-4480	efoote@smithfoote.com
Baton Rouge Area	Ann G. Scarle	(225)214-5563	ann@brba.org
Covington/Mandeville Area	Suzanne E. Bayle	(504)524-3781	sebayle@bellsouth.net
Denham Springs Area	Mary E. Heck Barrios	(225)664-9508	mary@barrioslaw.com
Houma/Thibodaux Area	Danna Schwab	(985)868-1342	dschwab@theschwablawfirm.com
Jefferson Parish Area	Pat M. Franz	(504)455-1986	patfranz@bellsouth.net
Lafayette Area	Susan Holliday	(337)237-4700	susan@lafayettebar.org
Lake Charles Area	Chantell Marie Smith	(337)475-4882	csmith5@ldol.state.la.us
Monroe Area	John C. Roa	(318)387-2422	roa@hhsclaw.com
Natchitoches Area	Peyton Cunningham, Jr.	(318)352-6314 Cell (318)481-5815	peytonc1@bellsouth.net
New Orleans Area	Helena N. Henderson	(504)525-7453	hhenderson@neworleansbar.org
Opelousas/Ville Platte/Sunset Area	John L. Olivier	(337)662-5242 (337)942-9836 (337)232-0874	johnolivier@centurytel.net
River Parishes Area	Jude G. Gravois	(225)265-3923 (225)265-9828 Cell (225)270-7705	judegravois@bellsouth.net
Shreveport Area	Sandra Haynes	(318)222-3643	shaynes@shreveportbar.com

For more information, go to: [www.lsba.org/2007InsideLSBA/solace.asp](http://www.lsba.org/2007InsideLSBA/solace.asp).

of any member of the legal community, or members of their family, who might have a need. We will circulate the request to our fellow legal professionals and get results. The requestor's name is anonymous.

Second, sign up to become a member of SOLACE. Again, it costs you nothing. Hopefully, you and your family will never need our services. However, by your being on the e-mail list, you will see what attorneys and other legal professionals do for each other in their times of need, and the e-mails will serve as a constant reminder that, if you have a need, help is only an e-mail away.

To request assistance, contact Zainey at Jay\_Zainey@laed.uscourts.gov or any of the SOLACE area coordinators established throughout Louisiana. See the SOLACE contacts box on page 234 Or go to the LSBA's Web site and complete the online form: [www.lsba.org/2007InsideLSBA/solace.asp](http://www.lsba.org/2007InsideLSBA/solace.asp). Once the request is in the hands of Zainey and the coordinators, an e-mail reaches the network and assistance options start coming in.

To become part of the assistance network, e-mail Zainey at Jay\_Zainey@laed.uscourts.gov or Surprenant at mark.surprenant@arlaw.com.

*Judge Jay C. Zainey was appointed by President George W. Bush to the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana in 2002. He is a past president of the Louisiana State Bar Association. During his term as president, he created the Community Action Committee and the Legal Services for Person with Disabilities Committee. He is a co-founder of the SOLACE program. In 2004, he organized the Homeless Experience Legal Protection (H.E.L.P.) Program, now in operation in several Louisiana cities and in other states. The program provides legal consultation and notary services at homeless centers. He also has assisted Tulane Law School in the development of its Disability Law Society. With his wife Joy, he co-founded St. Andrew's Village, a faith-based, long-term living community for adults with disabilities. He is currently serving as board president of St. Andrew's Village. He wrote a chapter in Lawyers Working to End Homelessness, a book published by the American Bar Association's Commission on Homelessness and Poverty.*



## A SOLACE Success Story

The efforts expended by the 5,000+ members in the SOLACE assistance network are often completed in anonymity. Letters of gratitude flow in and are shared with the network via e-mail. One such letter from a grateful recipient follows:

Last year, 2008, was a very rough year for me. I had numerous deaths in my family, including that of my father, and it was a very difficult time for me and my husband. Then, in October, we learned that I was pregnant with our first child. While I continued to work as much as I could, it was a difficult pregnancy, and I was very sick and on bed rest most of the time. For a number of reasons, including the fact that I was our primary breadwinner and we had just used almost everything in our possession to take a trip to lay my father's remains to rest, we found ourselves almost completely destitute. Then, to make matters worse, our landlord informed us that he was going to raise our rent at the end of our lease, which would expire the next month.

At that point, a fellow attorney dear friend of mine contacted SOLACE about my problems, and SOLACE helped us out in a HUGE way. We found a place to live on our own because a good friend had a vacant house, but SOLACE did everything else for us. I don't know the names of all of the people who helped, as many of them chose to remain anonymous. Here are the things members of SOLACE did for us:

First, several members donated clothing, furniture, toys and just about everything else we needed to completely furnish a nursery for my son.

Then, while one member made arrangements to put us up in a hotel downtown for the weekend so that we could rest, other members came to our home and completely packed, moved and unpacked ALL of our belongings and furniture. These wonderful people also completely cleaned out our old apartment and helped arrange everything in our new apartment so that it was livable when we returned.

Additionally, I have three dogs that I love dearly and another member of SOLACE came over and spent two weekends of his own time making the backyard in our new home completely safe for them. The yard had been untouched since Katrina, and this man and his helper removed all of the overgrown foliage, tilled the land and planted new grass. Then, they put latticework under the house to keep the dogs from escaping and finally they built a fence where the previous one had broken so that the dogs would be safely enclosed.

As if these first three things were not enough, we were given enough money in cash donations to buy a new microwave, put in a dog door, and pay for half of our first month's rent. Additionally, another member donated an almost-new, industrial-sized washer and dryer to us so that we would be able to do our laundry.

Needless to say, there are not enough words to express my gratitude for the things that SOLACE did for me. I am so grateful and, even though it has been a year now, I still break out in tears when I think of all of the wonderful acts of kindness that were bestowed upon us. For everything I've named, there may have been even more done that I've forgotten to mention because it was so overwhelming at the time. I would like to thank EVERYONE who assisted a fellow member of the legal profession — a total stranger — in my time of need.