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LSBA/LBF Community Action Committee Receives CASA Award for Secret Santa Project

NEW ORLEANS—The Louisiana State Bar Association/Louisiana Bar Foundation's (LSBA/LBF) Community Action Committee recently received the CASA (Court-Appointed Special Advocates) Angel of the Year Award for its Secret Santa Project.

Nicole Wesley Harrell, an advocate supervisor with CASA of Terrebonne, Inc., based in Houma, La., nominated the Secret Santa Project for the award. Alona R. Croteau, 2009-10 co-chair of the LSBA/LBF Community Action Committee, accepted the award at the eighth annual CASA Volunteer Recognition Banquet in December.

Through the Secret Santa Project, which successfully completed its 13th year in December, members of the Louisiana legal community "adopt" needy children represented by various social service agencies and provide clothes and gifts to these children, with inspiration based on the children's own "wish lists."

The Angel of the Year Award is presented annually to an individual or group that has gone above and beyond what is expected in order to help a CASA child, said CASA of Terrebonne Executive Director Stacey Martin. Only one award is given each year. CASA of Terrebonne collects nominations and a committee reviews all nominations and votes on the most deserving person or group. Past recipients have been foster parents, attorneys, teachers, Office of Community Services workers and therapists, Martin said.

Martin thanked all Louisiana legal professionals for considering CASA as a donation site for holiday gifts. "Most of the children we serve have never had a Christmas. Your organization allows these children to experience some joy in their lives," she said.

For the 2009 Secret Santa Project, 877 children, represented by 15 social service agencies in six Louisiana parishes, received gifts from legal professionals throughout the state. These children were represented by the Methodist Home for Children (Mandeville); Southeast Spouse Abuse Program; St. John the Baptist's Supportive Housing Program (New Orleans); El YoYo Bilingual Early Head Start (Jefferson Parish); JEFFCAP Head Start (Jefferson Parish); CASA of New Orleans; Children's Bureau (New Orleans); Children's Special Health Services (New Orleans region); Children's Special Health Services (Hammond region); CASA of Lafourche; CASA of Terrebonne; New Orleans Women's Shelter; Metropolitan Battered Women's Program, Inc.; Boys Hope Girls Hope (New Orleans); and North Rampart Community Center (New Orleans).

The mission of CASA of Terrebonne, Inc. is to be an independent and objective presence in the courts and to speak for the best interest of abused and neglected children of Terrebonne Parish.

The Louisiana State Bar Association assists its more than 20,000 members in the practice of law. The statewide association, as part of its multi-faceted mission, promotes and maintains access to justice initiatives for the state's residents, assists the Louisiana Supreme Court in its regulation of the practice of law, upholds the honor of the courts and the profession, and supports programs that increase public understanding of and respect for the law.

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