



2011 LAP Honors

The 2011 LAP Training Session was not all “doom and gloom” despite the necessity to address disturbing topics such as depression in the legal profession. Overall, there was much fun, fellowship and laughter over the weekend.

One of the “high notes” of the presentation took place when it was my pleasure and honor as the new executive director of LAP to present three awards to distinguished members of the LSBA CADA Executive Committee and LAP.

Sue Tart of New Orleans received a Certificate of Appreciation for her continuous service as an Officer of the Executive Committee of the LSBA Committee on Alcohol and Drug Abuse. She has served as both Secretary and Treasurer over the years, starting in 2004, and she was Treasurer through 2010. She has been an indispensable asset to the Executive Committee and she was recognized for her service.

Kathleen Leary received an award recognizing her 25 years of invaluable support and service to the Lawyers Assistance Program. Without the dedication and support she has provided to LAP and Bill Leary behind the scenes, our program simply would not have reached its goals. She has been an integral part of the success of LAP and, as we all know, she is one of the most caring and gifted clinicians to be found.



Buddy Stockwell, Executive Director of LAP presents 25 year retirement award to Kathleen Leary



New LAP Executive Director Buddy Stockwell presents 25 year service award to retired Executive Director, Bill Leary

Finally, Bill Leary was awarded a plaque commemorating his 25 years at the helm of the Lawyers Assistance Program. Bill’s extraordinary leadership and unflagging dedication to LAP has made our Louisiana program one of the finest and most comprehensive programs in the nation.

It was a very poignant moment for us all to honor Bill and Kathleen Leary’s retirement. They are not just Louisiana Legends but are in fact National Treasures who have provided tireless, invaluable service to the American Bar Association’s Committee on Lawyers Assistance Programs nationwide.

Both Bill and Kathleen remain actively involved in many areas of the recovery community and their retirement from LAP has not slowed them down.

Bill is a member of a newly formed committee “Judges Helping Judges” that aims to help educate the Louisiana bench and raise awareness about issues that impair judges. This valuable service will assist the judiciary in its efforts to encourage impaired judges to reach out to LAP for help.

Also, Bill has been involved with the Bridge House in New Orleans for years and has recently been named Treasurer of that fine organization.

Kathleen serves as a member of the Board of Directors of the Louisiana Association on Compulsive Gambling. She also spends much of her time assisting impaired nurses in the Houma area.

As such, the Learys continue to devote their time and effort to assisting others and fostering recovery. It’s what they do!

St. Francisville's History Directly Related to LAP's Mission



Grace Episcopal Church is the historic centerpiece of St. Francisville

A visit to St. Francisville is not complete without seeing Grace Episcopal Church atop the bluffs overlooking the Mississippi. It's one of the oldest Episcopal churches in the state.

On May 13, 2011, the Friday before the LAP Training Session on Saturday, I was able to visit this historic Church yet again.

I grew up in New Roads, just across the Mississippi from St. Francisville. Since early childhood I have been mesmerized by Grace Church and its surrounding grounds. It is one of those special places on earth that radiates spirituality on an unusually powerful scale.

It was quite amazing for me to be standing there in 2011 aware that one of the most notable moments in the history of Grace Church was directly pertinent to my presentation on Depression in the Legal profession to come the next day.

Back in June of 1863, the Civil War was raging at Port Hudson several miles south of St. Francisville. Major General Nathaniel Banks was leading 30,000 Union troops against only 7,000 Confederate troops led by Major General Franklin Gardner. At stake: control of the Mississippi River. Confederate cannons atop Port Hudson's bluffs had effectively kept all Union gunboats to the south, except for the USS Albatross.

The battle at Port Hudson was at fever pitch, but on June 12, 1863, the scene was ominously calm in St. Francisville despite the Union gunboat USS Albatross sitting at anchor just offshore and positioned to easily shell St. Francisville. There was no attack; instead the ship's cannons sat silent while the ship's surgeon and two officers struggled in the sweltering June heat to carry the remains of their captain up the bluffs to Grace Church to be buried. The cause of death: suicide.

Lt. Commander John E. Hart of Schenectady, New York, captain of the USS Albatross, had killed himself. As fate would have it, Captain Hart was a Freemason and his notes indicated his wishes were to be buried, not consigned to the waters of the Mississippi. A landing party from the Albatross came ashore to determine if brother Masons were present in St. Francisville. Fortunately, they were able to make contact with one of the oldest Masonic lodges in the state, the Feliciana Lodge. The Feliciana Lodge declared it had a duty to bury a brother Mason "regardless of the circumstances of the outside world."

Some speculate that this act of brotherhood saved Grace Church from Union shells. Captain Hart was buried in the Masonic burial lot of Grace Church and on that day both Union and Confederate troops paid respects at the service. These events are referred to as "The Day the War Stopped" and each year there is a reenactment in St. Francisville.

The Civil War resumed the next day. On July 3rd Lee's northern invasion was turned back at Gettysburg. Vicksburg fell to the Union on July 4th and Port Hudson was taken on July 9th. In one fateful week the Confederacy was defeated.

Bringing things full circle, as I stood under the majestic oaks of Grace Church, I thought of Captain Hart and pondered why a naval hero with a known reputation for extreme courage had chosen to take his own life. I then associated his death to the epidemic of depression and suicide that has resulted in the loss of so many courageous and gifted members of the Louisiana State Bar. And I thought of the tremendous work that is left to be done to raise awareness about the dangers of depression and suicide, and the ghastly statistics we face in the legal profession. I wondered: what would Captain Hart think of our mission at LAP and what would he suggest we do at LAP to reach out to the depressed and help prevent suicides in the legal profession?



In the Grace Church cemetery, graves dating back to the 1700's are surrounded by majestic live oaks and the sweet smell of gardenia

Preventing Depression, Burn-out and Stress Related Illness

The first and hardest step is acknowledging a problem exists. Lawyers and judges are extremely independent and self-sufficient by nature and it is not in our natures to admit anything that can be remotely perceived as a weakness. Plus, smart lawyers and judges are convinced they can think their way out of all the problems they encounter. Sadly, this is literally killing people in our profession.

During my presentation at the 2011 LAP Training Session, I highlighted the epidemic of depression in the legal profession and also presented the short film "A Terrible Melancholy" that has been produced by the Erie Bar Association in New York. The film centers on Abraham Lincoln's history of chronic depression and also, in part, features appearances by Dan Lukasik, a lawyer who has recovered from depression and has spearheaded the now heralded website:
<http://lawyerswithdepression.com>

Every lawyer and judge needs to become more aware of depression and burnout and how "white knuckling" through long periods of anxiety, stress, and lower levels of depression can, without warning, crescendo into catastrophic events that take the lawyer by surprise. Lawyers and judges all too often consider stress and depression to be an acceptable component of their job description. They do not take care of themselves and rarely put themselves first. This results in an alarming number of mental breakdowns and, in the most heartbreaking cases, suicide.

I shared during my presentation in St. Francisville that one of my best friends at LSU law school jumped off the Crescent City Connection in New Orleans in 2009 and fell to his death. He had suffered from depression. During my brief tenure to date as the executive director of LAP, one Louisiana lawyer has killed himself by gunshot. Another is recovering from a near miss with suicide. As one would expect, these incidents are virtually never publicized and that results in the severity of the epidemic of depression and suicide being shielded from view.

Accordingly, the epidemic of depression in the legal profession remains largely out of sight and out of mind. And while members of our profession are becoming more cognizant of the alarming statistics, it is still extremely difficult to convince lawyers and judges that no one is immune from depression.

If you are feeling stressed out, burned out, and not exactly "happy, joyous and free" in the legal profession, here are some suggested courses of action¹ that lawyers and judges can employ to prevent or mitigate burnout and depression:

1. Re-assess your balance of career success versus personal fulfillment. Sacrificing time with family and rarely having time for interests outside work and the practice of law indicates a potential need for recalibration. Make it a point to set goals to better balance work and play.
2. Don't allow yourself to become isolated. Get out of the office and the house and make sure you are still genuinely and openly involved with friends and engaged in extra-curricular activities and hobbies that are NOT in any way associated with being a lawyer or practicing law.
3. Listen to others. Pay attention to signs that perhaps you need to change problematic interpersonal habits and pessimistic thinking.
4. Beware of the "golden handcuffs" and becoming so entrenched in a high-income lifestyle that it is difficult to scale back billable hours as necessary to make time for a healthy personal life outside the practice of law.
5. Don't bring your "lawyering" home with you. Being skeptical, judgmental and striving to always be "right" with friends and family can destroy those personal relationships.
6. Be cognizant that, as lawyers and judges, we are trained to operate at a high level of intellectual abstraction that is analytical and disconnected from personal emotions so as to allow us to represent clients effectively. That mode of thinking, however, can be severely damaging to our well-being if stress is allowed to fester. Mental health care professionals recommend that lawyers and judges take the time to develop and adhere to a daily routine of stress management tools such as exercise, healthy diet, meditation, yoga and simple things such as learning to say "no" to new tasks when overburdened and stressed out.

In summary, this topic is rooted first and foremost in the issue of a need for increased awareness. Until lawyers and judges become more aware of the epidemic of stress, burnout and depression in the legal profession, and how it is impacting them personally, our profession will remain under siege.

If you need more information on ways to beat burnout, stress, anxiety and depression, or you feel that you could possibly benefit from an evaluation, contact the Lawyers Assistance Program today.

¹ These suggestions are derived from the article Mental Health in the Legal Profession by Scott Mitchell, Diversity & The Bar, October 2007



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Kathleen Leary, Melissa Stockwell, and Carol Shadoin enjoy a beautiful day in St. Francisville

Flooding Did Not Affect LAP's 2011 Training Session

As if my first Annual LAP Training Session as executive director of LAP was not exciting enough in and of itself, my Administrative Assistant, Joanne Fenner Milburn, and I found ourselves scrambling the day before the seminar to obtain accurate information and update it often to help dispel rumors that "St. Francisville is flooded" . . . all while encouraging participants to have confidence that there would be no problems for travelers.

Upon arriving in St. Francisville Thursday evening on the 12th, I immediately drove to the bluffs to see what was going on "down the hill" at old Bayou Sara where the low road heads out to the old ferry landing. As I already knew, having grown up in the area, St. Francisville was high and dry but the low lying riverbed and road below the bluffs at Bayou Sara were both flooded, preventing road access out to the river and ferry landing.

I was in boot camp in the Navy at Orlando, Florida, in 1973 when the Mississippi previously demanded the Morganza spillway be opened. Much has changed since then. For one thing, as a result of the swollen Mississippi, the beautiful John James Audubon Bridge was opened early to connect New Roads and St. Francisville. Simultaneously, the old ferry was permanently closed, much to my dismay. Crossing the river by ferry at St. Francisville was a maritime adventure I enjoyed my entire life. It is a piece of history that will be missed by many of us.

What I did not expect on the drive up to St. Francisville on Thursday was to see that Thompson's Creek was as high as I have ever seen it. Later on that Friday night, it rained extremely hard and we all feared that Thompson's Creek would rise above the bridge on US 61 and that the road would be closed by morning. The Serenity Prayer was of high utility.

Luckily, on Saturday there were no such impediments to travel, the creek did not rise, and the Training Session was extremely well attended. The presentations went well and a good time was had by all as we finished the morning session with a BBQ lunch.

We hope to see all of you at the 2012 Training Session!

All the best,
Buddy Stockwell

