



LSBA'S 19TH SOLO, SMALL FIRM & TECH CONFERENCE **HILTON NEW ORLEANS AIRPORT HOTEL**

901 Airline Drive
Kenner, LA, 70062

APRIL 10, 2026

SPEAKER BIOS

Eric K. Barefield is Ethics Counsel for the Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA). A law graduate of LSU, Eric began his professional career as an Assistant District Attorney in Orleans Parish. He later served as Deputy Disciplinary Counsel with the Office of Disciplinary Counsel and was responsible for investigating and prosecuting violations of the Louisiana Rules of Professional Conduct. He joined the LSBA staff in 2005, working first with the Practice Assistance Program's alternatives to discipline. Eric is responsible for the LSBA's Ethics Advisory Service which is comprised of attorneys across the state along with Ethics Counsel and provides confidential non-binding ethics opinions to Louisiana licensed attorneys.

Austin Benton is a practicing attorney at the law firm of Benton, Benton & Benton and focuses on domestic and civil litigation. He is also the owner of the legal technology company, Ayla, LLC. Ayla designs and builds document automation systems for practitioners of personal injury, family, successions, criminal, foreclosure, and commercial defense work. Ayla is utilized by firms located in Louisiana (including McGlinchey Stafford), New York, Texas, Florida, Mississippi, California, and Ohio. Austin works with over 100 law firms to assist in increasing productivity and decreasing the time required to generate simple and complex legal and administrative documents. Austin is also a member of the Access to Justice Technology Subcommittee.

Kristie L. Bowerman, founder of Immigration and Nationality Law Group in New Orleans, represents clients around the world in a broad range of U.S. immigration matters, with a particular emphasis on employment-based immigration. Her clients have Fortune 100 and 500 companies, professional sports teams, a world-renowned circus arts entertainment company, oil and gas companies, colleges and universities, K-12 schools, IT companies, financial firms, television networks, hospitals, engineering firms, religious organizations, and marine companies, among many others. A Tulane law graduate, she also regularly represents clients with family-based permanent residence and U.S. citizenship.

Honorable Susan M. Chehardy is the Chief Judge of the Louisiana 5th Circuit Court of Appeal. She was elected to the appellate bench in 1998 as the court's first woman judge (and reelected in 2012). Prior to the appellate bench, she served as judge for the 24th JDC, after an active general litigation personal injury practice with the firm of Chehardy, Sherman, Ellis and Breslin; and later with her own litigation firm, Chehardy & Nielsen. She also recently served as justice *pro tempore* for the Louisiana Supreme Court. A law graduate of Loyola University, she is a member of the Fifth Circuit Judges Association, the Fourth and Fifth Circuit Judges Association, the Association of Women Judges and the American Judicature Society, among other organizations. A frequent lecturer for the Louisiana Judicial College and the LSBA, she serves several committees and boards by appointment of the Louisiana Supreme Court.

Davidson Ehle, founder of Marino and Ehle, focuses on federal and state trial and appellate criminal practice and on personal injury and family law. In 2023, he was named President-Elect of the Jefferson Bar Association and is a certified instructor for the Gretna Police Academy. His early legal career was as an assistant district attorney for the Parish of Jefferson and later as a director and author of the Louisiana Crime Laboratory Study, a comprehensive and comparative analysis of crime laboratories in Louisiana, Virginia, and Florida. He hails from LSU for his undergraduate degree and from Mississippi College School of Law for his JD. He is also a board member of the Westbank Boys & Girls Club.

Brian Essex is the Senior Director of Compliance and Corporate Counsel with Gilsbar Specialty Insurance Services. He also serves as Loss Prevention Counsel for the LSBA. He provides business-focused legal solutions while navigating complex legal, regulatory, and operational challenges for large, multi-brand organizations. Before Gilsbar, he served as in-house counsel for a variety of industries, having held senior legal roles across a variety of industries. He served as Deputy General Counsel at ServiceMaster Brands, overseeing legal franchise matters and compliance for six brands. He has a B.S. in Accountancy from Creighton University and a J.D. from the University of Louisville. He currently resides in Metairie, LA, with his wife, Jessica, and their daughter, Cyla.

Shawn L. Holahan is the Practice Management and Loss Prevention Counsel for the Louisiana State Bar Association, where she oversees the fee dispute arbitration program and helps lawyers build smarter, more sustainable practices. She is also Secretary of the ABA Law Practice Division and Vice Chair of the ABA TECHSHOW Planning Board. Shawn is also the Columns Editor for *ABA Law Practice Magazine* and a regular contributor to *ABA Law Practice Today*. Before joining the bar, she was a partner at a mid-sized New Orleans law firm focused on labor and employment law and completed two federal clerkships in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana. Today, she works with lawyers to improve workflows, make better technology decisions, and reduce risk in everyday practice. She also hosts a weekly live radio broadcast for the blind on WRBH 88.3 FM.

Burton Kelso is the owner and Chief Tech Expert at Integral and a globally recognized tech commentator for television and radio. He also hosts *Burton Kelso, The Technology Expert* on YouTube, where audiences get smart, practical insights on technology without the headache. Known for blending real-world leadership with engaging storytelling, Burton breaks down the modern “Big Four”: artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, digital marketing, and the future of technology. He cuts through hype, buzzwords, and tech jargon (on purpose) to deliver strategies leaders can actually use on Monday morning. Having translated fast-moving tech trends for audiences worldwide, Burton makes complex ideas accessible, relevant, and occasionally even fun. Whether he’s addressing the C-suite or frontline teams, Burton equips audiences with the confidence to understand and lead in the future of technology.

Joseph A. Marino III, a founder of Marino and Ehle, has focused most of his more than 30 years in legal practice on criminal defense in Gretna, La. He was also elected to two terms as a Louisiana State Representative for District 85, serving the Judiciary Committee and the Civil Law Committee, and chairing the Administration of Criminal Justice Committee. He is also a former Gretna City Councilman and former president of the Jefferson Bar Association and a certified instructor for the Gretna, Kenner and Westwego Police Academies. Last year, the Supreme Court of Louisiana appointed him, ad hoc, to Division “D” of the 24th Judicial District Court through December 2023. He holds a journalism degree from LSU and a JD from the University of South Carolina School of Law (and is proud alumni of Holy Cross school in New Orleans).

Honorable John J. Molaison, Jr. serves the Louisiana Fifth Circuit Court of Appeal, joining the court in August 2018 after serving as Chief Judge for the 24th Judicial District Court. Before taking the bench, he was a felony prosecutor with the Jefferson Parish District Attorney’s Office, and managing partner of Molaison & LeBlanc, while also serving for many years as Prosecutor and City Attorney for Westwego and as Prosecutor and Town Attorney for Grand Isle. A Loyola graduate, Judge Molaison serves on the Judiciary Commission of Louisiana and the Supreme Court’s District Court Rules Committee and teaches at the National Judicial College and Loyola University College of Law.

Daya Naef is an attorney based in New Orleans, entrepreneur, and business and AI strategist with deep experience in the legal and construction industries. With over 20 years in law (seven coaching and two with hands-on AI strategy experience), she guides law firms and professional service businesses toward sustainable growth and smarter operations. With a JD degree from Loyola, Daya's career spans litigation, mediation, and legal consulting. Daya is the founder of The Success Partner and assists firms scale, modernize, and compete through leadership development and practical innovation. A sought-after speaker and mentor, she delivers actionable insights on business development and the future of law. Outside of work, Daya enjoys sculpting, reading, and time with her cats, balancing strategy with creativity.

Hunter Thevis is the president and co-founder of S1 Technology, an IT and cybersecurity managed service provider in Lafayette, Louisiana. Holding a degree in Information Systems & Decision Sciences from LSU and an MBA from UL, Hunter provides strategic IT support and advanced cybersecurity solutions to small businesses including law firms. He is also the founder of DEFCON Acadiana, a non-profit group dedicated to strengthening the region against cyber threats. A proud Lafayette resident, Hunter is also a devoted husband, new father, and avid golfer.