



By Shayna L. Sonnier

# My Final Message: It Has Been an Honor and a Privilege to Serve Our Profession

**M**y first “real” introduction to the Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA) was in April 2008. I was appointed to fill a vacancy for the District 4 representative on the LSBA Young Lawyers Section Council (now Division, YLD). At the time, I was very active in the Southwest Louisiana Bar Association’s Young Lawyers Section, but I was not involved with anything on the state level. If you had told me at the time that I would be writing my final LSBA President’s Message 16 years later, I would have said you were crazy.

The first YLD committee on which I served was the Wills for Heroes (WFH) Committee, which just celebrated its 15-year anniversary. (See page 394 for a more in-depth article on WFH). I co-chaired the committee with Eve Sarco Reardon, and she and I worked tirelessly to get the program ready and have our first event, which was held at the Lake Charles Fire Department. In that moment, I realized how much good we can do in our profession, and it inspired me to go down a larger path of service. Not only were we serving the public by providing a much-needed legal service, but we were giving other members of our profession a chance to give back and grow their legal experience at the same time. I can confidently say that all our volunteers left the WFH events feeling good about being a lawyer. And they should because what we do matters. It matters to the people/groups/entities we help daily, regardless if they are paying for those services. The services we provide are the services they need, and they rely on us to help them navigate the difficult situations in which they find themselves. I truly believe that the practice of law is a noble profession, and we

should all treat it as such. I am happy to say that the YLD has continued to grow the WFH program far beyond what we were able to do in 2008, and I am so proud to be a part of its history.

My involvement in the LSBA YLD opened an entirely new world for me, both professionally and personally. After my service on the YLD, I continued to participate in the LSBA by serving as the district representative on the Board of Governors. I also served in the LSBA House of Delegates prior to moving into my role as an LSBA officer. As a result, I have met so many members with whom I have had the pleasure to work and collaborate. Some of these relationships have not been limited to work within the LSBA but in practice as well. The regular interaction with members from across the state has allowed me the opportunity to grow as an attorney and practice in jurisdictions and/or areas I otherwise would not have had the chance to do, and I am incredibly grateful for those opportunities and experiences. In addition to the professional growth my involvement has afforded me, I have also met individuals who I now consider to be my closest friends — people I would have never met had it not been for my involvement in the LSBA and friends who I wouldn’t trade for anything.

When I decided to run for president, it was because I truly wanted to play a part in keeping our great organization moving forward. As I said at my swearing-in, the position of president is not about the person who holds it; it is about continuing to help the organization serve its members in all the ways that it can. What we, as leaders of the LSBA, do is focus on how to better serve our members so that they may serve the public while thriving in this profession. That goal will always be

a moving target because the needs of the profession change as the world changes. For example, we are now getting a first glimpse of AI and how it will impact our profession going forward. Whatever the changes on the horizon, the LSBA leadership will continue to do its best to provide the services our members need to be successful. I realize that some of you reading this may feel that we have fallen short or that the services we provide do not help you directly. I would agree with you. There are areas in which improvement needs to occur, and there are services that need to be expanded. Sadly, that will always be the case as the needs continue to change. What I can tell you is that we will never stop working for you. We will never stop trying to meet those needs, and I invite you to become more involved to help us achieve those goals. There are so many opportunities to be involved in the LSBA, and I highly encourage all of you to take advantage and find a way to serve that interests you.

I cannot fully express how much I have enjoyed serving this past year. It has truly been an extraordinary experience. It would take up all my allotted page space to say thank you to all the people to whom I owe thanks, but just know that your bar leaders, both present and *past*, work tirelessly for the betterment of our profession. They do not ask for thanks, nor do they ask for recognition. They are true servants, and I want them to know how much they are appreciated.

It has been an honor and a privilege to serve my profession this past year, and I will be forever grateful for the opportunity.

*Shayna L. Sonnier*