

# HOUSTON BAR FOUNDATION CORNERSTONE

Volume 15 • November 2008

## *A Message From the Houston Bar Foundation Chair*

Since I took office as Chair of the Houston Bar Foundation last January, the most frequent question I have been asked by lawyers in our town is, "What exactly is the Houston Bar Foundation?" Many say, "I have heard of it but am not really sure what it does." In my Message from the Chair, I would like to provide an answer to that question.

Simply put, the Houston Bar Foundation is the heart of our legal community. Anyone who practices law in Houston knows that although it is a big city, it is really a very small town. The lawyers here know each other. The lawyers here care about each other and go out of their way to help those in need. The Houston Bar Foundation is the vehicle that allows them to provide the special skills that only lawyers have to help the people who need it most but can afford it least.

The mission of the Houston Bar Foundation is to promote the core value of making our system of justice available to those who cannot afford an attorney. Anyone who has volunteered in our legal clinics and pro bono programs has seen that those without means often have little hope of justice. Many cannot speak English. Many have no money. Where do they get help when they cannot afford a lawyer? They get it from the HVLP -- the Houston Volunteer Lawyers Program. Where does the HVLP get money to help these people? From the Houston Bar Foundation. Where does the Houston Bar Foundation get money to give to HVLP? From you and me.

We give money and raise money for the Houston Bar Foundation because it is the charitable arm of the Houston Bar Association. If you are a member of the Houston Bar Association, then you are already a member of the Houston Bar Foundation as well. The Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization, is the primary funding mechanism that allows the Houston Volunteer Lawyers Program to exist. The HVLP has become a key component in the community by providing pro bono legal services to low-income and indigent residents of Harris County. Through the generosity of Houston's lawyers, law firms and corporate legal departments, the HVLP has been able to make a difference in many people's lives. But you should know that the Foundation does more than provide pro bono services. The programs and good works of the Foundation cannot be adequately chronicled in this short message, but are more widespread than you may know.

Some of the other charitable endeavors of the Foundation are featured in this publication, which illustrates the breadth of support made available to those in need. For example, a little known fact about the Houston Bar Foundation is that it also reaches out to help lawyers who may be in trouble. Over the years, the Foundation has provided assistance to lawyers who find themselves in distress due



2008 Foundation  
Chair  
Debra Tsuchiyama  
Baker

to health problems, family crises or the need for rehabilitation services, among other situations. This year, the HVLP is turning its attention as well to the plight of our veterans, many of whom have legal needs that require our help. A special initiative to fund legal services for our veterans is underway and will require the time, attention and financial support of our bar membership as we use the tools of the HVLP to give back to these people who have given so much to us -- at great personal cost. They deserve the help of Houston's talented lawyers, and the Houston Bar Foundation is committed to raising money to fund the veteran's initiative.

You should know that the annual Harvest Party is the Foundation's main fund-raiser. It provides the largest component of funding needed for the Foundation's programs, and obtaining sufficient underwriting for this annual event is critical to the existence

of the HVLP and other programs. If you want to support the Foundation, participating as an underwriter for the Harvest Party is the most direct way to make a difference. You should also know that the Fellows program of the Houston Bar Foundation is another key component for providing a steady stream of funding that is necessary to ensure the continuance of the Foundation's charitable programs. Pledges from HBF Fellows are the day-to-day lifeblood of the Foundation, so if you receive an invitation to become or continue as a Fellow of the Houston Bar Foundation, please say yes.

Finally, the Foundation receives money from donations. Individuals and firms make direct contributions, such as recent grants received from David Healey and the new Houston office of Fish & Richardson for law students and law firm support staff impacted by Hurricane Ike. I take pride in recognizing the direct contributions made by my Night Court family, all of whom truly stand out in the realm of volunteerism. For more than 18 years, the lawyers of Night Court -- lawyers entertaining for charity -- have used their talents to grow a community lawyer theatre group into a venture that allows them to donate significant funds for the programs of the Houston Bar Foundation. It has been my privilege to work with them as a writer and producer of the show. This year alone, the Night Court cast and crew was able to raise over \$86,000 for the programs supported by the Foundation. To all of these volunteers, the Houston Bar Foundation is well-known and well-deserving of their time and effort. And for that, I say thank you.

I say the following to those who have asked, "What is the Houston Bar Foundation?" It is the heart in a profession that is sometimes perceived to be heartless. We need to keep the heartbeat alive, and I hope you will find a place in your heart to support the Houston Bar Foundation as it gives hope and help to those in need.