

ASSOCIATION OF
WOMEN ATTORNEYS

THE AWA BRIEF

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 2 FALL 2009

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

“Delicious autumn! My very soul is wedded to it, and if I were a bird I would fly about the earth seeking the successive autumns.” George Eliot

I think that Victorian novelist Mary Anne Evans, better known by her pseudonym, George Eliot, had it right. Fall is my favorite time of year—children returning to school, football games, cooler weather, pumpkins, and mums. Not to mention the costumes and candy apples of Halloween.

Autumn also brings us to a new judicial year. The 2009-2010 U.S. Supreme Court term will begin on the fifth of October with two new participants, Justice Sonia Sotomayor and Solicitor General Elena Kagan. However, both women have already made their debut due to a rare reargument heard last week. Justice Sotomayor appeared on the bench for the first time and Kagan made her first argument as the first female U.S. Solicitor General in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*. The decision in this case will be an important one because the Court could strike down on free-speech grounds a 102-year-old ban against corporations spending large sums of money to elect or defeat congressional and presidential candidates. Such a decision would reshape American politics beginning with the congressional campaign in 2010. We will quickly see the effect these women will have on our nation’s highest court.

Closer to home, fall brings a great deal of activity and opportunities for AWA members. The most important event of

our year, the Judicial Reception, takes place on Wednesday, October 28, 2009, from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at River Oaks Country Club. We will honor the judges of the Harris County District Courts and the Houston Division of the United States District Courts for the Southern District of Texas. The chairs, Sofia Adrogué and S. Shawn Stephens, have been hard at work throughout the summer to make this event a success. I urge you to participate in honoring the judges by becoming a sponsor and by attending the reception.



In addition to our regular meetings, two new events will add to the flurry of fall activity on a social and creative level. In mid-October, we will resurrect the book club for a special event in conjunction with the Museum of Fine Arts. The following month, we will have the opportunity to visit the gallery/home of John Palmer, an abstract artist represented in fine art galleries around the world. Many thanks to Kim Singer with FindLaw for arranging this event.

So, like Mary Anne Evans, I look forward to celebrating autumn. I also look forward to seeing Justice Sotomayor and Solicitor General Kagan influence legal decision-making and sign their own names to legal documents, unlike Mary Anne Evans, who had to use the a man’s name to be taken seriously.

2009-2010 AWA
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The Association of Women Attorneys' Judicial Reception
will be held on
Wednesday, October 28, 2009 from 5:30 p.m.-7:30 p.m.
River Oaks Country Club
1600 River Oaks Boulevard

This year the AWA is honoring the Judges of the
Harris County Civil District Courts
and
Federal District Courts, Southern District of Texas-Houston Division

Tickets are: **\$55 per person** in advance for **AWA members**
 \$65 per person in advance for **non-AWA members**
 \$75 per person at the door (both AWA members and non-members)
 \$25 per person for **non-honoree judges**

If you are interested in purchasing tickets or sponsoring this event, please contact
Sofia Adrogué at (713) 986-7110 or sadrogue@lrmlaw.com; or
S. Shawn Stephens at (713) 646-1398 or sstephens@bakerlaw.com.

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JUDICIAL PROFILE — JUDGE DION RAMOS

By: Jennifer Rustay

Behind every lawyer is a story of what drew him or her to the law. Few can say their calling arose from covering hard-fought, contentious trials for television audiences. But covering high profile capital trials is exactly what drew one young journalist to the law. Far from wanting to escape his daily work, Judge Dion Ramos wanted to be in the thick of things as a participant, not a spectator. So at the age of twenty-three, Judge Ramos decided to take the bold step of leaving behind all that he had accomplished in his first career to pursue a second.

Judge Ramos grew up in Florida, the state in which he and his parents had lived since his father's immigration from Cuba. When Judge Ramos decided to leave journalism and apply to law schools, he selected schools located in areas in which he thought he might want to practice. When he was accepted at the University of Houston, once again, he took a bold step, leaving Florida behind. Judge Ramos's father, a World War II veteran who had attended college and law school on the GI Bill, urged Judge Ramos to pursue a career that would not take as much time as the practice of law. Undeterred, Judge Ramos set out for a new career in a new state.

Very quickly, Judge Ramos found himself fascinated by the high-stakes litigation in Houston's civil trials. Even as a law student, he worked with Houston firms to get as much practical experience as possible. As he learned the Houston legal landscape, he gravitated to maritime work, something he attributes to

Florida and his love of the sea. After law school, Judge Ramos headed to Tulane and obtained his L.L.M. in maritime law. His love of the sea was not the only factor in deciding to attend Tulane, however. During his time in Houston, Judge Ramos met and married his wife, Lynn. Having grown up in Louisiana, she was delighted to spend years in New Orleans while Judge Ramos completed his degree.

As a lawyer, Judge Ramos first worked with Brown Sims in the maritime arena before moving to Ryan & Marshall. There, he worked on a general defense docket. When remembering those years, Judge Ramos speaks fondly of the time he spent in the heat of trial. It was his time in trial that firmed up his belief in the virtue of the jury system, its power to equalize all parties, and the benefit of having disputes decided on a level playing field.

Judge Ramos's desire to see that playing fields remain level also fuels his interest in protecting the integrity of the judicial process. As a lawyer for an insurance company, Judge Ramos worked for clients specifically and the jury trial system generally, believing that the concerted good efforts of each lawyer are essential to the integrity of the system as a whole. During this time, Judge Ramos began teaching trial advocacy, hoping to help others with what he had learned through his own experience.

Judge Ramos counts himself fortunate to have had many mentors that shaped his practice. One of them was Dan Ryan, a former prosecutor who taught, by example, the courage

required to try cases. Mr. Ryan also showed how to structure and deliver arguments in a manner so that every listener would believe in the righteousness the cause. When Judge Ramos moved to his next firm, he learned from a peer, Spencer Markle. Judge Ramos describes Mr. Markle as a technically proficient and creative lawyer for whom persuasion and the law seemed intuitive.

The tenets of Judge Ramos's judicial philosophy are deeply held. Judge Ramos believes in judicial independence. By that, judges should be afforded discretion to decide the matters before them. Judge Ramos believes that the decisions made by trial judges who see and hear witnesses, evidence and argument should be given great weight. Trial judges, rather than appellate

“ALL LAWYERS SERVE A GREATER SYSTEM AND SHOULD PROTECT THE INTEGRITY OF THAT SYSTEM AND ITS PROCESSES.”

courts reading a sterile transcript, are the best arbiters of credibility. He also believes that lawyers should see that no lawsuit is an end unto itself, but that all lawyers serve a greater system and should protect the integrity of that system and its processes. He cautions that interest groups that attempt to skew the process to attain a result in specific types of cases erode the foundation of the continued vitality of the judicial system, a consequence he believes should be avoided.

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HIGHLIGHTS FROM AWATINI 2—THE WATERMELON CRAWL

By: Caroline Marciano, Newsletter Editor

“We got a hundred gallons of sweet red wine;

Made from the biggest watermelons on the vine;

Help yourself to some but obey the law;

If you drink don’t drive, do the watermelon crawl.”

If Tracy Byrd only knew what he was starting when he wrote the lyrics to this charming country song! Alas, it was the Watermelon Crawl that brought AWA members, judges, judicial candidates and many others to Avant Garden on Wednesday, August 12, 2009, for the AWA Foundation’s AWAtini 2. Not even the torrential rain at the beginning of the evening could keep the crowd away. Attendees were privileged to dine on food from providers the likes of Extreme Pita, My Fit Foods, and Cabot Creamery Cooperative, and munch on tasty watermelon-shaped cookies and fruit bouquets compliments of Cookies by Design and Edible Arrangements.

Milling around the various rooms, you could hear that the conversation was pleasant and lively, which made the eclectic venue in the heart of Montrose turn into a glorious late-summer getaway. The “super secret silent auction” gave an air of friendly competition as attendees bid on items such as tickets to the Houston Ballet, Houston Grand Opera and Houston Aeros events; gift certificates for photography packages, bagels and healthy meals; and prints and posters fit to adorn any office or reception wall.

Pedicabs provided transportation for the work-weary revelers to embark upon their AWAtini 2 experience, and hopefully avoid doing any other “crawl” but the Watermelon Crawl back home for the night.

Central to the AWA Foundation’s purpose for AWAtini 2, however, was not the camaraderie nor the cute fans that each attendee received to stay cool in the August heat, but the broader goal of raising money for the annual AWA scholarships awarded to women law students at each of the Houston area law schools. The event raised over \$5,000 to help make a difference in the lives of deserving women currently attending law school. A visit to the Foundation’s website, www.awahouston.org, can provide you with a full list of sponsors and in-kind donors whose generosity and support made AWAtini 2 a great success.



While much has been done, however, there is always more to do. The AWA Foundation is always accepting donations from AWA members and nonmembers alike. Don’t be afraid to make your contribution to better the life of a deserving woman law student when you choose to renew your AWA dues later this fall. Watermelon crawl notwithstanding, imagine the difference you can make!

JUDICIAL PROFILE — JUDGE DION RAMOS CONT’D

*Continued from page 3

These philosophies shape the day-to-day operation of Judge Ramos’s courtroom. He believes that courtrooms should be a place of formality so that every litigant will walk away after a trial confident that a process was adhered to and that they were able to exercise their right to be heard. Judge Ramos also believes that all lawyers and litigants should

address the Court and each other with deference, and that people should stand and sit when appropriate to lend an air of gravity to proceedings. Doing so, he believes, impresses upon the parties, lawyers and jury that the courtroom is a place of a formal process in which they are special participants. Judge Ramos believes that in such a courtroom, every litigant will believe that he or

she has been afforded fairness and their day in court, irrespective of the outcome of any specific proceeding. He wants every litigant to walk away from his courtroom believing that they have been given the best trial that they could have, and that the process was applied fairly. Judge Ramos wants to reciprocate the professionalism he asks of others by being a judge who is

both decisive and timely in his rulings.

In his rare moments of leisure time, Judge Ramos enjoys spending time with his wife and children or working toward preparing for the MS 150. He is in his fifth year of participation. He also enjoys music and reading.

KEEPING UP WITH PAST PRESIDENTS — TERESA WALDROP

By: Caroline Marciano, Newsletter Editor

It was Teresa Waldrop who first introduced me to the Association of Women Attorneys during my law school days. Teresa was AWA president in 2003-2004, when I was president of the Association of Women in Law at the University of Houston Law Center, and she always made sure that I was kept informed of AWA activities. Because of Teresa's willingness to include law students within the parameters of the AWA I became involved in the AWA during law school and have continued my involvement to this day. As such, I found it particularly delightful to meet with Teresa to talk to her about what she has been doing since she was AWA president.

Teresa's practice focuses primarily on family law, with some probate, guardianship and related matters sprinkled in. Teresa has particularly developed a niche of representing non-participant spouses in negotiating, settling and litigating divorce disputes arising from the characterization and division of pension and retirement benefits in the Houston Police Officer Pension System Plan and the Houston Firefighters' Relief & Retirement Fund. Oftentimes the participants in these plans retire with valuable benefits, and in the event of a divorce non-participant spouses can often be unaware of what stones to turn over to retain their rights to a portion of these plans. However, a lot of Teresa's work in this area involves reviewing the division of these plan benefits in old divorce decrees. In the event her clients own but have been denied their interest in the benefits, Teresa helps them enforce and clarify their old decrees to obtain the value of those benefits. Teresa's work in this area has led to her involvement in two reported appellate cases involving issues surrounding the rights to these retirement benefits: *Stavinoha v. Stavinoha*, 126 S.W.3d 604 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 2004, no pet.) (characterization of retirement benefits in HPOPS upon divorce) and *Gainous v. Gainous*, 219 S.W.3d 97 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.] 2006) (enforcement of award of retirement benefits in HFRRF to former spouse).



In her spare time Teresa enjoys collecting contemporary art. Her favorite piece is the one that she owns from James Surls' Splendor Years series. James is originally from the Houston area and his sculpture, "Points of View", resides in Houston's Market Square Park. Teresa also owns

works by Susan Budge, a native Houstonian who is currently a professor in San Antonio, and David Simpson, an American icon. Teresa collects primarily minimalist reductive works in order to create a serene and calm living space for her time away from the office—can you blame her?

I was particularly interested in learning how Teresa is using the social networking sites of Facebook and Twitter for marketing purposes. Like many of us, Teresa has a Facebook page solely for professional purposes that she uses to reconnect with old civil litigation colleagues as well as judges. However, she has gone one step further and created the Houston Family Law page, which all Houston area family law attorneys

TERESA
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can use as a forum to discuss family law topics. Teresa posts topics and questions that are designed to be provocative and interesting for members of the family law bar. The page has acquired 85 friends since the first part of August, and Teresa would next like to engage family law experts to begin a discussion on a relevant topic for each day of the week. She hopes to see member practitioners one day expand the use of the site for job searches, seeking office assistants and paralegals, and other matters. Teresa also uses Twitter to outline interesting provisions that she finds while perusing the Texas Family Code, and members are welcome to follow her "tweets" by typing in "TeresaWaldrop" on the Twitter website.

Teresa believes that joining the AWA was one of best things that she did when she moved to Houston. The AWA was a good way for her to break into the Houston legal community, and she still enjoys going to AWA meetings and events and not knowing everyone there. Teresa believes that in the past 30 years the AWA has morphed from a group that was originally a mentoring/support group to more of a social organization. She acknowledges that some of the problems women lawyers faced thirty years ago still exist, but we have come a long way in that time, and our purpose and focus is somewhat different now as a result. But while our group continues to move forward, Teresa believes it is still important for us to look backward so as to not lose the AWA's history. If we keep our historical perspective and remember why we did things the way we did, we will learn how to better prepare ourselves for the challenges that women lawyers face in the future.

TAKE A MEMBER TO LUNCH—CHRISTINA HUSTON

By: Ashlee Ross, AWA Secretary

Earlier this summer I had the distinct pleasure of dining with AWA member Christina Huston at Teala's on 3210 W Dallas St. Our lunch there was not necessarily something to write home about, but the service was fast and attentive, and the conversation was even more delightful as I learned so much about this fabulous member of ours.

After 14 years of working for lawyers, Christina Huston decided enough was enough and she was ready to go to law school. "I finally got to the point where I had sat at counsel table during a dozen or so trials, but I wanted to do more than just *sit* in court," Christina said. "I wanted to *speak* in court."

Christina first went to work at a law firm when she was 18-years old "because I could type fast." Though she worked in civil trial/personal injury litigation for most of that time, about five years before returning to school, there was an increased emphasis in medical malpractice litigation.

Christina enrolled at the University of Houston in 2001 and began work on her bachelor's degree. She majored in English and minored in history. After completing her undergraduate degree, a professor in the English department encouraged her to stay and pursue a master's degree and PhD in English. Christina admits she was tempted. But her husband, attorney Ralph Huston, encouraged her to stay the course, and Christina enrolled in law school at the University of Houston in 2004.

Christina said she was motivated by the words of her ailing father who told her "life is short. If you want to do something, get it done." She also had two children and two step-children goading her on. "It was difficult to give up a good career and an excellent paycheck – for six years! – but I had a lot of family support," she says.

After graduating from law school, she found herself back in civil litigation. She landed her current position at Cruse, Scott, Henderson & Allen in June 2008 after applying for a job that was posted on the University of Houston alumni website. The job description specified the position was open to third-year attorneys, but Christina just crossed her fingers and said a prayer. "I wrote and said 'I am not a three-year attorney, but before you throw away my C.V., let me tell you what experience I do have.'" She explained her long legal career and why she should be considered for the position.

One piece of advice from Christina – keep networking. When she entered her undergraduate program in 2001, Christina said she lost track with many of her professional contacts. When later looking for clerkships and jobs, Christina said these contacts might have been helpful.

Cruse, Scott has 23 attorneys, and Christina's practice focuses on professional liability defense. Christina and her husband, Ralph, live in Clear Lake, and spend most of their "non-billable" time chasing around after children, step-children, and a granddaughter (Erin, James, John, Alex, and Jami) and their assorted interests. "It's a pretty diverse crowd at my house," she says, "but it keeps things exciting."

ONE PIECE OF
ADVICE FROM
CHRISTINA—KEEP
NETWORKING.



Christina Conner Huston

Christina Huston

- Professional Liability Defense Attorney at Cruse, Scott, Henderson & Allen, LLP
- University of Houston Law Center, 2007 graduate
- B.A., English *summa cum laude*, also from the University of Houston, minor in History
- Joined the AWA in her second year of law school



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MEMBERS ON THE MOVE

Joanne Ericksen, AWA President-Elect, has joined The Balcom Law Firm as an associate.

Pamela Powell, AWA President, recently appeared on Fox News 26 to discuss the nomination process for U.S. Supreme Court nominee Sonia Sotomayor. Way to represent, Pamela!

*Have something you'd like to share with the AWA members—career change, wedding, etc? E-mail Caroline Marciano at cmarciano@cenatiempo.com to include your special announcement in the next newsletter!

Liberty Mutual offers personal lines property and casualty insurance at a group discount to AWA members. Please contact Sara Payne at (281) 392-4333 ext. 57101 for further information.

DON'T MISS THESE UPCOMING EVENTS...

SEPTEMBER 23, 2009: AWA GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING at La Griglia, 2002 West Gray. Jim Cornell of Cornell & Pardue will present "What Every Lawyer Should Know about Insurance and Insurance Law". The meeting begins with networking at 6:00 p.m. followed by the presentation at 6:30 p.m. To RSVP, email Joanne Ericksen at jmejoanne@yahoo.com.

The AWA Foundation will hold a mini silent auction during this meeting for the following fabulous items: Two Houston Chamber Choir tickets (any performance); Arbonne Skin Care Gift Certificate and Consultation; Bejay's Photography gift certificate for a studio sitting and 11x14 portrait. Don't miss out on this unique opportunity to support the Foundation!

The AWA will be collecting women's interview-appropriate suits, handbags, and briefcases for the HBA's collaboration with Dress for Success Houston at this meeting. Cash donations will also be accepted; for every \$75 in donations, Dress for Success can purchase one new suit. The HBA Family Law Section is collecting as well ... let's see if we can surpass their donations!

OCTOBER 15, 2009: SPECIAL AWA ONE-TIME BOOK CLUB EVENT in partnership with the Museum of Fine Arts. We will read Harriet Scott Chessman's *Lydia Cassatt Reading the Morning Paper*, a fictitious account of the relationship between famed American-born impressionist painter Mary Cassatt and her sister and model, Lydia. Meet after work at the Museum of Fine Arts for a guided tour of the relevant works of art, followed by a discussion of the book over dinner at Café Express located on the lower level of the Audrey Jones Beck Building. **Tentative date is Thursday, October 15**; actual date will be emailed to the membership once confirmed with the museum. Email Pamela Powell at

pepowell@cenatiempo.com with RSVP's and questions.

NOVEMBER 4, 2009: EVENING OF ART & WINE SPONSORED BY FINDLAW, TEXAS LEGAL SUPPORT AND THE AWA.

Treat yourself to a relaxing evening of art and wine at the John Palmer Gallery, located at 1218 Heights Boulevard, on Thursday, November 4 at 6:30 p.m., compliments of FindLaw, US Legal Support, and the Association of Women Attorneys. Palmer is an internationally known contemporary, abstract artist. For more information about the gallery, go to www.johnpalmerart.com. Kim Singer, Senior Client Development Consultant with FindLaw, has graciously organized this event for our membership.

NOVEMBER 18, 2009: AWA GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING at La Griglia, 2002 West Gray.

Kim Singer of Findlaw will present "Creating an Effective and Professional Web Presence". The meeting begins with networking at 6:00 p.m. followed by the presentation at 6:30 p.m. To RSVP, email Joanne Ericksen at jmejoanne@yahoo.com.

NOVEMBER 19, 2009: A NIGHT OUT BENEFITING DRESS FOR SUCCESS.

Join other AWA members at the Westin Oaks Hotel from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. on November 19, 2009 for this annual event sponsored by Gardere Wynne Sewell LLP, which includes boutique shopping over cocktails, a fashion presentation by national fashion and image consultant Cathy Fitzpatrick Cleary, a seated dinner, and inspirational stories from Dress for Success clients. Tickets are \$100 per person. Send you check payable to Dress for Success Houston to Pamela Powell, Cenatiempo & Ditta, LLP, 1400 Post Oak Blvd., Suite 1150, Houston, Texas, 77056, to be included in the AWA group attending this fundraiser.