

THE AWA BRIEF

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 4 NOVEMBER 2010

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Fall has arrived, Houston style! The temperatures have dropped into the 80s, the mornings are in the chilly 60s, and we even have a few days of low humidity. Splendid! But for me, the true sign of Fall is the annual AWA Judicial Reception, which took place on October 26. This year we honored the women judges of the Harris County District Courts. Christina Huston and Susan Myres served as our hard-working co-chairs. Thanks to Christina and Susan we had a wonderful event with a “To Kill A Mockingbird” theme, creative tablescapes, and delicious food. A special thank you to Sofia Adroque for enabling us to hold the judicial reception at the beautiful River Oaks Country Club.

Our next special event is the AWA Holiday Party, which will be held at the home of Hon. Keith Ellison, on Wednesday, December 8, 2010, in lieu of our general meeting. Watch the website for more information.

Shakespeare said, “He is well paid that is well satisfied.” Truer words were never spoken! I have been struggling with job dissatisfaction for several years now. I put up with it because at least I was getting a steady paycheck. However, I was *not* satisfied. Friends commented on the strain in my face, that I didn’t laugh very much anymore. My parents, always advocates of hard work and making personal sacrifices, came to me one day and said, “Joanne, some things just aren’t worth it.” *That* caught my attention. And I began to

think. Was a steady paycheck really worth all this stress and unhappiness? No, but what choice did I really have?

I have bills to pay and student loans to pay off.

As I reflected on my dilemma, I started to look at things in a different way. What sense did it make to choose to pay my Macy’s bill over having satisfaction in my life? By Shakespeare’s standards I was a pauper! Then I realized: everyone lives the life of their choosing. I had been choosing a paycheck and misery over satisfaction. NOT a good choice.

As a result of this epiphany, I took the plunge and chose to start my own law practice. I have never been happier! I’m smiling more and the laughter comes easily. Oh sure, having your own practice can be stressful, but it’s *my* firm and the choices are mine. I have my life back. I am satisfied. While the paycheck is not quite as steady, I *am* well-paid. I am living the life of my choosing and it feels good. What choices do you need to make in your life?



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A CONVERSATION WITH JUDGE CAROLINE BAKER

By Jenn Rustay

As a young girl, Caroline Baker was taught the story of her great grandmother Alice Graham Baker's efforts in 1902 to start an organization to meet the needs of those less fortunate. She learned of a true Southern lady whose steely resolve allowed her to cross societal boundaries in order to do what she thought was right for no purpose other than to serve. Those lessons were passed along to all of her family. Today, Judge Baker (and her mother!) are deeply involved in the organization that her great grandmother founded, Neighborhood Centers Inc. Neighborhood Centers Inc. is a group that assists in underserved communities by providing neighborhood centers, senior adult centers, a charter school, a credit union, training for teachers, educational assistance beginning with Early Head Start and Early Childhood Education Centers and continuing with Head Start and preschool programs for children prior to kindergarten. In addition to educational assistance and providing positive places for young children, students, and senior adults to spend time, Neighborhood Centers facilities provide for real world needs like immigration assistance, tax centers, and child care for working parents. Judge Baker has been involved in many of these efforts, both at the serving-the-client and at the administrative levels.

Judge Baker did not compartmentalize the lessons of service she learned, nor did she limit the idea of service to work with charitable organizations. Instead, Judge Baker lives what her family modeled in every aspect of her life and her heart for service is apparent in the way in which she approaches her work in the court. Judge Baker left a successful trial practice as a partner with McFall, Sherwood & Sheehy for the bench. For twelve years, Judge Baker served (and continues to serve) the citizens of Harris County as a civil district court judge who is unapologetically committed to public service through maintaining a courtroom in which parties, jurors, and lawyers know that all sides to a dispute will be fully and fairly heard. Creating such an environment is no easy task. Yet those who spend any amount of time with Judge Baker quickly see that she finds joy in doing what she does each and every day. Judge Baker says she enjoys being a judge because she enjoys solving problems. She understands that lawyers and litigants are in a hotly adversarial setting, are committed to their positions,

and sometimes, from that vantage point, do not (or cannot, when positions are diametrically opposed) see the way to work through the issues. She wants all litigants to know she is willing to listen to them and to work with them to resolve their disputes. She believes the key aspects of good judicial temperament are patience, willingness to listen and hear people out completely, a love of working with people, and the ability – and judgment – to know when a laugh will help ease an intensity-charged moment.

Judge Baker's background prepared her for many of the challenges her judicial career has brought her. Growing up, her family modeled devotion to public service work. Judge Baker's strong background in academics achieved at Princeton for undergraduate studies and the University of Texas School of Law provided her many opportunities. When she went through law school, she remembers being steered toward a transactional practice by professors, and also remembers being drawn to trial work. That notion was not encouraged – and was discouraged – for young women studying law, but Judge Baker chose to follow her gut instinct. That decision served her well in two respects. First, she got to do what she loved. Second, she saw that she was best at things that resonated with her – things consistent with her “gut instinct,” – and she learned to trust her instincts. She found that this led her to work in which she could be passionately engaged. Time has shown that she was right about trial work and loving the courtroom. Her last twelve years as a judge have been among her happiest as a lawyer, because she finds she can be successful by being willing to give back – by listening patiently, following the guidance of the law, and reaching conclusions that, while not always liked, can be respected.

Judge Baker has said that her success and happiness on the bench have compelled her to want to ensure that other women have the same opportunities to find fulfillment through the lives they lead. In addition to her work with Neighborhood Centers Inc., she also has worked extensively with Girls, Inc. She loves this group because its emphasis is to teach young women to be strong, smart, and bold, that knowledge is power, and that the more they learn academically, in life skills, and emotionally, the better equipped they are for life.

* Continued on page 7.

FORMER AWA PRESIDENT UPDATE-BARBARA K. RUNGE

By Lorie M. Robinson

In 1976, Barbara K. Runge received a postcard in the mail inviting her to meet in Judge Ruby Sondock's courtroom to discuss forming an organization of women lawyers. Not knowing what this meeting would lead to, Barbara walked through the doors of Judge Sondock's courtroom that afternoon to discover about sixty other female attorneys in attendance who were just as curious as she was. Among those founding members in attendance were Patricia "Patsy" Wicoff and Burta Rhoads Raborn - both of whom ultimately served as Presidents of the AWA.

Six years after that fateful afternoon, Barbara became the sixth President of the Association of Women Attorneys (1982-1983). Her years of involvement in the AWA also include serving as Secretary; member of the Executive Board; and President of the AWA's President's Council (now Association of Women Attorneys Foundation).

Since becoming a founding member of the AWA and completing her term as president, Barbara has built a very successful family law practice founded on her passion. Through her professional work as well as her continued active involvement in many legal, business and community organizations, she has also received numerous awards and honors. Her knowledge, passion for the law and unique approach to her practice, have all gained her recognition by clients and peers as one of Houston's leading family lawyers. However, to understand how this former president has achieved what she has today, one must be provided a glimpse into her past.

This native Houstonian's passion for the law was inspired by a television series, featuring a female attorney, she watched as a child. Although the series was short-lived and lasted only a season, it had a lifetime effect on Barbara as a little girl. Barbara says, "It was the first time I ever realized that the practice of law was not solely reserved for men, but that I could be an attorney, too." From that point on, she told everyone she wanted to be an attorney, even when responses were rumblings of discouragement. Fortunately, Barbara chose to listen to two female teachers from her high school who provided constant encouragement and a persistent reminder "that she could be anything she wanted to be."

After graduating from Austin High School, Barbara ventured to Lubbock, Texas to attend Texas Tech University with all intentions of obtaining not only her undergraduate degree but also of achieving her ultimate goal of becoming an attorney. However, her undergraduate career was almost cut short when her



mother became very ill and her family no longer had the extra money to pay for her college. When a neighbor encouraged her to apply for a scholarship through the American Business Women's Association - Skyscraper Chapter, Barbara seized the opportunity. The American Business Women's Association - Skyscraper Chapter was a local women's professional organization whose members, as Barbara describes, were "working women who thought women should be able to have professions and that would host bake sales to raise money to put girls through college." Without the scholarships she received from the amazing women of the American Business Women's Association, her dreams of obtaining a college degree and attending law school would have remained just that - dreams. The American Business Women's Association continues to promote education within the Houston Community through its Houston Area Council that today consists of 23 member Chapters and Networks.

Through all of the trials and tribulations life has thrown at Barbara, she has emerged as one of the leading family lawyers in the Houston area, being named over multiple years, to *Best Lawyers in America*; *Super Lawyers*; *Top Family Lawyers*; *Top Lawyers*; and *Top Lawyers for the People*. Her hard work and commitment to everything she touches has not gone unrecognized by professional women, her peers and members of the

* Continued on page 8.

TIFFANY STAR — LINHUYEN PHAM

By Ashlee Ross

Linhuyen Pham was awarded the Tiffany Star at AWA's August meeting. Linhuyen has served on AWA's board for three years and has tremendously helped the organization with technical matters. She created AWA's Facebook page and has organized online document storage for the board. Linhuyen has served the organization and the community at each judicial endorsement meeting to ensure the organization's endorsements are posted to AWA's website as quickly as possible. She is the organization's go-to member when the questions involve the website, and she is frequently referred to as "the technology guru". In the past when the organization did not distribute its newsletters in PDF format, Linhuyen

took on the task of converting the newsletter for posting on the website.

At many AWA events, you see Linhuyen on the other side of the camera, quickly working her way around the room to take dozens of pictures to document our events. Linhuyen has volunteered to serve and lead several organizations, and she brings a unique, well-reasoned perspective to the AWA board.



Linhuyen is an attorney with Heard & Medack, and she also holds her MBA from the University of Houston. Linhuyen is also very involved with the Asian American Bar Association of Houston.

PAST RECIPIENTS INCLUDE: Deborah Lawson, Shannon Powers, Barbara Gardner, Carol Keough, Trisha Keough, Joanne Ericksen, Janet Beck, Johnetta Lang, Andrea Tran, Chantal Rappi, Rachel Greene, Caroline Marciano, Pamela Powell, Teri Walter, Heather Asselin, Alia Vinson, Martha Failing, Lynne Clarke, Denise Kurt, Lisa Rossmiller, Deana Freeman, Jenn Rustay, Patricia Casey, Monica Vaughan, Paige Sarff, Karen Hurwitz, Teresa Waldrop, Hon. Eva Guzman, Susan Myres, Jeannine Flynn, Janiece Horn, Janet Schafer, Terry Elizondo, Barbara Runge, Janice Pardue, Cameron Vann, Sally Andrews, Ellen Shelton, Kathleen Gasner, Elizabeth Asher, Brenda Whitehead, Karen Lister Conticello, Katherine Yzaguirre, Mary K. Quinn, Lisa Isgitt, and Ashlee Ross.

AWA ANNUAL JUDICIAL RECEPTION 2010

By Joanne M. Ericksen, President

This year the AWA honored the women judges of the Harris County District Courts. Christina Huston and Susan Myres served as our hard-working co-chairs. Thanks to Christina and Susan we had a wonderful event with a “To Kill A Mockingbird” theme, creative tablescapes, and delicious food. A special thank you to Sofia Adroque for enabling us to hold the judicial reception at the beautiful River Oaks Country Club.

More pictures of the judicial reception may be found on FaceBook at <http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=46357&id=100000197873197&l=a08222ce86> . To view the additional photos, you do not need a FaceBook account.



COME JOIN THE FUN AT THESE UPCOMING AWA EVENTS!

By Laura Gibson, President-Elect

The Association Women Attorneys has had wonderful programming this year and we have some exciting events planned for the next several months. On November 17, 2010, from 6:00-7:30 p.m., we will be recognizing our AWA Foundation scholarship winners and also having a fashion show at the Michael Kemper Salon located in the Highland Village Shopping Center at 4059 Westheimer Road. You won't want to miss seeing some of our members and judges modeling beautiful clothing from JoAnn's in Rice Village. Additionally, the salon will have stylists available for consultation.

We will be celebrating our scholarship recipients while at the same time previewing the fall fashions and perhaps even doing a little shopping. Renowned jeweler, Jill Reno, will have her jewelry on hand and our scholarship recipients will be modeling her beautiful pieces. Jill is a jewelry designer to the stars. Some of her customers

include Jennifer Aniston, Carrie Underwood, Halle Berry and Courtney Cox. She has pieces that are inexpensive and also very high end items. You will not be disappointed. Please join us at the AWA's Scholarship Recipient Recognition Reception and Fashion Show.

We will not be having a meeting in December. Instead, on December 8, 2010, the Honorable Keith Ellison and his wife, Kathleen, will be hosting the AWA holiday party in their beautiful home. Mark your calendar now because you won't want to miss this wonderful event.

On January 19, 2011, our very own board member, Rebecca Thai, will be speaking to our group on What You Need to Know About the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. This is a very timely topic given the great deal of scrutiny companies are facing in this area. We look forward to seeing you at one or more of these events.



AWA Holiday Party 2009



TAKE A MEMBER TO LUNCH—DENISE KURT

By Joanne M. Ericksen, President

I recently had lunch with AWA member Denise Kurt at Charivari, which is located in Midtown, 2521 Bagby at McGowen. I had a hectic morning and the afternoon ahead promised to be equally hectic, but as soon as I walked through the doors of Charivari, all my cares slipped away. Charivari is an oasis of European charm and tranquility.

Shortly after I arrived, Denise walked in. Her smile lights up the room. She is one of the most effervescent people I have ever met. She immediately launched into a delightful conversation about her recent trip to Austria, the homeland of her beloved father-in-law, who is a Holocaust survivor. She told me about how meaningful it was to her to visit the house her father-in-law lived in as a little boy before he had to flee during World War II. In just a few minutes Denise conveyed how much her family meant to her, the joy of celebrating her 13th wedding anniversary with her husband Walter, and her passion for travel and food.

Within a few minutes of being seated, Irmgard-Maria, one of the charming owners of Charivari, arrived at our table and greeted us warmly. Irmgard-Maria is originally from Germany, and her fondness for German food is evident on the menu, as well as the daily specials. Her husband, Chef Johann Schuster, is originally from Transylvania, and together they have created a beautiful restaurant brimming with European charm and fine cuisine. In fact, Charivari is French

for “beautiful good mix.” I can’t think of a restaurant more aptly named!

Denise and I both chose to partake in one of the \$9.99 daily specials, which consisted of a beautiful, golden-colored squash soup, velvety with cream, and juxtaposed with a sprinkling of crisp croutons. Our second course consisted of Mushroom Ravioli bathed in a delightful sage-butter sauce. As an encore, Denise knowingly insisted we share a Linzer Torte for dessert. And I’m so glad we did! Charivari’s Linzer Torte, made with a gingerbread pastry and a perfect puree of raspberries, was the best I’ve ever had.

During the entire meal, Denise and I chattered away like old friends. She talked about how much she loves her job at the Texas Health and Human Services Commission: the people, the hours, the work...everything! All this enthusiasm and joy would make you think Denise has led a charmed life. However, she also openly discussed the challenges of having a special needs sister and the death of her father. To me, this is what makes Denise truly amazing. Despite the difficulties she has faced, she chooses to focus on the positive things in her life, to see the good. Suddenly, all the work-related concerns that I was stressed about when I walked into Charivari, seemed inconsequential. Not only because of the beautiful surroundings of the restaurant, but because of the beautiful spirit of Denise Kurt.

A CONVERSATION WITH JUDGE CAROLINE BAKER (CONTINUED)

*Continued from page 2.

Judge Baker brings this message along to girls in the Houston area, and brings that message home to her own family, where she and her attorney husband, Bruce Hurley, pass the message along to their two daughters and son.

Strongly committed to professional service, Judge Baker currently serves on two committees of the State Bar of Texas and has served as a member of the Committee on Judicial Ethics, Judicial Section, State Bar of Texas. She has served as Chair of the Ethics Committee for the Board of Civil Judges and Chair of the Administration of Justice Committee for the Board of District Judges. She also is a member of the Ethics

Committee for the National Association of Women Judges and serves as Chair Elect of the ADR Council, ADR Section of the Houston Bar Association. She has been a member and Chair of a State Bar Grievance Committee. Judge Baker also spends time mentoring aspiring lawyers through internships in the court and judging mock trials and mock hearings for students from the Houston law schools.

Judge Baker would be the first to acknowledge that her life was enriched by having a great grandmother who was a true Southern lady whose dedication and determination was a force that shaped lives, including hers. In an age where there are too few models of women who exhibit firmness tempered by grace and poise, Judge Baker is a model for all lawyers.

FORMER AWA PRESIDENT UPDATE— BARBARA K. RUNGE (CONTINUED)

*Continued from page 3.

legal community. As the AWA's nominee, Barbara was presented with the "Woman of Excellence Award" by the Houston Federation of Professional Women as well as our very own "Tiffany Star Award" in 2003. She also received the "David Gibson Award" by the Gulf Coast Family Law Specialists in 2003 and the "Mentor Recognition Award" presented by the Houston Bar Association Family Law Section in 2008.

Barbara continues to be a member of the Association of Women Attorneys and an extremely active leader in numerous legal, professional, alumni and non-profit organizations. In 1982, she became Trustee for the Texas Tech Law School Foundation - making her the first woman to hold a position as a Trustee; the youngest person to serve as a Trustee; and the second Texas Tech Law School graduate to serve. She later became President of the Board of Trustees, again achieving a "first" for the Texas Tech Law School Foundation as the first woman to serve as President of the Board of Trustees. Over the years, Barbara has served on the Texas Tech University's President's Task Force Committee; Texas Tech's Ex-Student Association's District Representative for Houston; Texas Tech Law School's Dean's Inner Circle; and on the Alumni Association.

The strong roots and friendships she established at her high school alma mater, Austin High School, have also led her to become one of the Board of Directors for the school, where she is active in raising money for scholarships and volunteers her time to speak to students. Additionally, for

the past six years, Barbara has served on the Board of Directors of Amazing Place, originally known as the Seniors Place. Amazing Place is a non-profit corporation that serves adults with early-stage memory loss. Recently, Barbara and the remaining Board of Directors completed a new state-of-the-art facility funded by a \$7.2 million capital campaign.

Today, Barbara's law practice includes an array of family law matters including arbitration, mediation, and collaborative law cases. Barbara is an elected Fellow in the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers and the International Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers. She has held numerous positions within the distinguished American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, including serving as an Arbitration Trainer/Co-Editor of the Arbitration Institute for the past 15 years.

The unwavering love and support of her husband, Rusty Howard, of 31 years, 13 nieces and nephews, and three goddaughters give Barbara that extra incentive to fulfill her life long dreams and to continue reaching out to others as someone once did for her. For Barbara, the AWA has been a great networking and mentoring group that has allowed her to develop meaningful friendships and business partnerships. She believes her involvement in the AWA, the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers and various other legal organizations, has afforded her the opportunity to strengthen relationships with many lawyers here in Houston and throughout the nation. A sense of connection, friendships and family are the founding blocks of the success of this inspiring woman and one of our former AWA presidents.





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WOMEN ATTORNEYS

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If you need to update your
membership information, please
email Linhuyen Pham at
linhuyenp@yahoo.com.

MEMBERS ON THE MOVE

Pamelia S. Barnett has launched The Barnett Law Group, PLLC., located at 1800 Bering Drive, Suite 540, 713.980.9939, psb@barnett-lawgroup.com. Ms. Barnett specializes in US immigration and nationality law and is board certified.

Paula Whitten recently joined Cooper Industries as litigation counsel.

Associate Judge Meca Walker accepted an appointment as associate judge in the 247th Family Court.

Judge Sheri Dean of the 309th Family Court welcomes **Charley Prine** as her new associate judge.

The AWA is now on Facebook!
www.facebook.com/awahoustonfan

Have something you'd like to share with the AWA members? E-mail Rebecca Thai at rthai@IntlCorpCompliance.com with your special announcement!

DON'T MISS THESE UPCOMING EVENTS...

November 17, 2010, 6:00 p.m.: AWA General Membership Meeting, Recognition of AWA Foundation Scholarship Winners, and Fashion Show
at the Michael Kemper Salon located in the Highland Village Shopping Center at 4059 Westheimer Road. Scholarship Recipient Recognition Reception and Fashion Show with fashions by JoAnn's in Rice Village and jewelry by renowned jeweler Jill Reno. No charge for AWA members; \$15 for non-AWA members. To RSVP or for more information, see page 5 of this newsletter, visit www.awahouston.com or email Stacy Grant at sgrant@ogblh.com.

December 8, 2010, 5:30 p.m.: AWA Holiday Party
The Honorable Keith Ellison and his wife, Kathleen, will be hosting the AWA holiday party in their beautiful home. AWA Members only. Please bring an unwrapped gift or cash

donation for our featured charity, Houston Achievement Place, which serves at-risk children. To RSVP or for more information, visit www.awahouston.com or email Stacy Grant at sgrant@ogblh.com.

January 19, 2010, 6:00 p.m.: AWA General Membership Meeting our very own board member, Rebecca Thai, will be speaking to our group on What You Need to Know About the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. This is a very timely topic given the great deal of scrutiny companies are facing in this area. No charge for AWA members; \$15 for non-AWA members. To RSVP or for more information, see page 5 of this newsletter, visit www.awahouston.com or email Stacy Grant at sgrant@ogblh.com.

AWA IN THE NEWS

County Civil Court at Law Races <http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/editorial/7244124.html> Judge Cagle and Bruce Mosier are endorsed by the Association of Women Attorneys and major local bar associations.

Civil District Court <http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/editorial/7235199.html> Donna Roth "has 24 years in civil trial practice and has been endorsed by ... the Association of Women Attorneys."