

ASSOCIATION OF  
WOMEN ATTORNEYS

# THE AWA BRIEF

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1      SUMMER 2009

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

What's a lawyer to do?

In the first quarter of 2009, demand for legal services dropped by more than 8% compared to the first quarter of 2008, according to the Hildebrandt Institute's Peer Monitor Economic Index released May 11.<sup>1</sup> Other reports show similar downturns. According to lawshucks.com, over 11,584 people have been laid off by major law firms, 4,671 lawyers and 6,913 staff, in the period from January 1, 2008, through May 9, 2009. The Labor Department announced that the number of unemployed lawyers jumped 66% last year to a ten-year high of 20,000. In an unprecedented move, large law firms are delaying the hiring of final-year law students to January 2010 or even January 2011 due to a decline in business. Some of the same firms are offering these students \$60 - 75,000 to *not* join the firms as agreed or to work at a non-profit for a year with the firm paying the organization to underwrite the expense.

Whether you are an associate, a partner, or a solo practitioner, chances are the current economic environment will have an impact on you through client cutbacks, reduced pay, staff reductions, lowered office morale, or rising accounts receivables. The result – stress on top of an already highly stressed group.

Studies suggest that lawyers tend to be overachievers whose training and work conditions suggest a predisposition to depression and anxiety. Most notable is a 1990 Johns Hopkins study to determine which occupations suffered the highest rates

of depression. Lawyers topped the list when adjusted for socioeconomic factors and were found to suffer from clinical depression at a rate of almost four times that of the norm. Although these studies were conducted almost twenty years ago, there is no indication that the results have changed. In fact, Dan Lukasik, a trial lawyer, tells the National Law Journal that hits to his web site Lawyers with Depression have increased 50% in the past six months.

The growing pressure on attorneys was emphasized by reported suicides of three prominent attorneys in the past six months. Two had reportedly been laid off in cost-cutting efforts and the other was facing a decline in business after a jury trial defeat for a major client. Reports from lawyer assistance programs indicate that laid-off attorneys, struggling solo practitioners, third-year law students without jobs pending, older attorneys postponing retirement, and others have been reaching out for help more than ever before, according to a May article in the National Law Journal.

I write of these statistics not to cause alarm, but to encourage you to take the necessary steps to care for yourself. As women this is particularly important because we typically juggle the responsibilities of both work and home, which means even

\* Continued on page 6



## 2009-2010 AWA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

*Pamela Powell, President*

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## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

MEET THE 2009-2010 AWA BOARD 2

JUDICIAL PROFILE— JUDGE AL BENNETT 3

TIFFANY STAR— SHANNON POWERS 4

KEEPING UP WITH PAST PRESIDENTS 5

CONFERENCE WITH THE CLERK 6

UPCOMING EVENTS 7

## MEET THE 2009-2010 AWA OFFICERS AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**PAMELA POWELL, PRESIDENT.** Pamela practices estate planning and probate law at Cenatiempo & Ditta, L.L.P. She served as the AWA Treasurer for the two years prior to her term as President-Elect. Pamela is enthusiastic about getting to know many new AWA members and working with the board and committee members to make this a year full of fun events.

**JOANNE ERICKSEN, PRESIDENT-ELECT.** Joanne is a senior associate at alliantgroup, lp and represents clients throughout the United States regarding issues related to the research and development tax credit. Joanne has been on the AWA Board since 2007 and has served as Chair of the Judicial Reception Committee and Special Events Committee, as well as helped plan the annual law student reception. Joanne is looking forward to working with this year’s fantastic Board to expand our membership and to encourage each and every member to become a vital participant in the many AWA committees.

**PATRICIA CASEY, PAST PRESIDENT.** Pat practices business litigation at Haynes & Boone, LLP. She previously served the AWA as President, and is looking forward to getting to know the AWA members better this year.

**ASHLEE ROSS, SECRETARY.** Ashlee practices real estate and probate law at Morris, Lendais, Hollrah & Snowden. She has previously served on the Board and on the judicial reception committee, and is a former AWA Foundation trustee. Ashlee is looking forward to inviting non-AWA members to our events and encouraging membership in the AWA.

**DEBORAH LAWSON, TREASURER.** Deborah is a freelance attorney specializing in admiralty/maritime and non-profit law and development. She returns for a second year on the Board, and also serves as an AWA Foundation trustee. Friendship is the fabric of our society, and there is no better place to make friends in the Houston legal community than as a member of the AWA.

**CAROLINE MARCIANO, NEWSLETTER EDITOR.** Caroline practices estate planning and probate law at Cenatiempo & Ditta, L.L.P. She has previously served the AWA as Newsletter Editor, Secretary and Chair of the Scholarship Committee, and is also currently a trustee of the AWA Foundation. Caroline is looking forward to getting to know new people through the AWA Board as well as attending the fantastic CLE’s that are planned for this year.

**JUDGE R. JACK CAGLE, BOARD MEMBER.** Judge Cagle has served as Judge of Harris County Civil Court at Law No. 1 for nine years. He is a graduate of Rice University and Baylor Law School. A longtime supporter of the AWA, Judge Cagle looks forward to sharing the joys of the legal profession and the great people within it through his service on the AWA Board.

“FRIENDSHIP IS THE FABRIC OF OUR SOCIETY, AND THERE IS NO BETTER PLACE TO MAKE FRIENDS IN THE HOUSTON LEGAL COMMUNITY THAN AS A MEMBER OF THE AWA.”

“WOMEN NEED TO EMPOWER EACH OTHER TO SUCCEED AND THE AWA IS A PERFECT PLATFORM FOR THIS TO HAPPEN.”

**LAURA GIBSON, BOARD MEMBER.** Laura is a partner with Ogden, Gibson, Broocks & Longoria, L.L.P., a Women’s Business Enterprise and a law firm specializing in commercial litigation. She is Board Certified in Labor & Employment Law. She has previously served on the AWA Judicial Reception Committee and volunteered for the AWA team that participated in the Houston Bar Association Lawyers Against Waste project. Laura is excited about serving on the Board of Directors this year and looks forward to working on ways to increase networking opportunities to AWA members.

**ROSE MORIARTY, BOARD MEMBER.** Rose left the practice of law and joined Media Masters, a marketing and communications firm that specializes in the legal industry, as a partner. She just completed her first work of fiction and is actively looking for an agent. She has previously served as the AWA Newsletter Editor. Rose strongly believes that women need to empower each other to succeed and the AWA is a perfect platform for this to happen.

**CONNIE PAYNE, BOARD MEMBER.** Connie has been an attorney in Harris County since 1982, and a solo practitioner since 1990. Her areas of practice include family law and general civil litigation. She has been a mentor for several attorneys recently out of law school. Connie has served on the Judicial Screening Committee several times. Connie is looking forward to all activities and CLE’s for the coming year and to working with the current enthusiastic Board.

**LINHUYEN PHAM, BOARD MEMBER.** Linhuyen works for Heard & Medack, P.C., handling insurance defense litigation. This is her second year serving on the AWA Board, and Linhuyen looks forward to helping the AWA update its website.

## JUDICIAL PROFILE — JUDGE AL BENNETT

By: Jennifer Rustay

Public Service. To many, those words represent only a concept. To Judge Al Bennett of Harris County’s 61st Civil District Court, it is a way of life, not just something he talks about. It is his calling, both as a judge and in all other aspects in his life.

As a young man growing up in Ennis, Texas, Judge Bennett and his two older brothers and older sister often spent time learning from their great-grandmother. Judge Bennett describes his first mentor as a “spark plug” who loved her great-grandchildren and the practical jokes they would play on her (and receive from her, too). When she told her great-grandchildren to make the most of every opportunity, she did so with a passion born of history, family, and overcoming obstacles. Her tenacity and perseverance, tempered by an easy smile and a strong faith, are characteristics Judge Bennett learned from her. His great-grandmother was active in her church (she was one of its founders). She lived to the age of 104, and used each day to serve the people in her community. But his great-grandmother was not Judge Bennett’s only role model for public service. Judge Bennett’s father was a member of the Teamsters Union in Garland, Texas and the president of the local Black Chamber of Commerce. His mother was a teacher and an active Meals on Wheels volunteer. The people in Judge Bennett’s early years demonstrated that serving others, whether it be in the home, church, Teamsters Union, or neighbors up and down the street, should be a way of life.

But it wasn’t until a routine high school English assignment that Judge Bennett decided on his career path. His English teacher assigned *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Judge Bennett had already developed a love of history, so it was no surprise to him that the racial climate of the book was emotionally charged. Judge Bennett said the book resonated with him because there he saw a man with everything put it all on the line for a higher calling, something beyond himself. He said it was then that he knew what he wanted to do: he would become a lawyer like the one in the book he read. He would be in a profession where he was serving people, a profession that would allow him to shoulder the problems of other people each day.

While a college student at the University of Houston, Judge Bennett was selected for the Mickey Leland Congressional Internship Program in Washington, DC. There, he was able to see, behind the scenes and in the halls of Congress, how the law could be shaped to respond to the needs of citizens. He began to yearn to become a polished advocate who could stand up and influence others on important issues, whether it be on the floors of Congress or in a courtroom. When he attended a session in which one hundred Senators amassed on the floor to override a Presidential veto, the electricity of that day made his decision clear. He was going to go to law school.

Judge Bennett was accepted to the law school at the University of California at Berkeley, but a mentor told him that if he wanted to practice law in Texas, he should go to law

school in Texas. So Judge Bennett canceled a housing reservation at Berkeley and entered the University of Texas School of Law. There, he met students who became important colleagues over the years. Additionally, at a student bar association conference, he made an even more important acquaintance. He met Tanyel, who would later become his wife. Equally important, at the age of 101, his great-grandmother got to see him graduate from law school. Judge Bennett recalls the pride he saw in her eyes among his fondest memories -- a daughter of a former slave who grew up hearing firsthand accounts of the ills of slavery was able to live

to see what her family could accomplish several generations later.

After law school, Judge Bennett married Tanyel, who is,

today, a labor and employment lawyer at LyondellBasell. Judge and Mrs. Bennett have two sons, Charles, eight, and Shane, six. While neither boy aspires to be a lawyer on a regular basis (they sometimes want to be bull riders or basketball players) the two boys provide countless hours of joy for Judge and Mrs. Bennett. After fifteen years of marriage, Judge and Mrs. Bennett have kept their tradition of a trip for just the two of them every five years together. They also enjoy reading, travel, and attending sports events for all sports.

\*Continued on page 4

“HE SAW A MAN WITH EVERYTHING PUT IT ALL ON THE LINE FOR A HIGHER CALLING, SOMETHING BEYOND HIMSELF.”

## TIFFANY STAR — SHANNON POWERS

By: Pamela Powell

Who do you call if you want to get lean, strong, and healthy ... Richard Simmons? Bob Harper? Jackie Warner? Bob Greene? No need – not if you have AWA fitness motivator Shannon Powers around.

Shannon rallied AWA members to take part in the National President’s Challenge last spring, which required a commitment of at least thirty minutes of exercise five days a week. To accomplish this task, she motivated members in meetings and coordinated fitness activities, such as group participation in the Race for the Cure and belly-dancing. In addition, Shannon established a group on the Texas Bar Circle site so that participants could encourage each other and stay informed on planned events.

Clearly passionate about physical activity, Shannon is an avid runner and a ski instructor. This past year, she ran the Koala Houston, Houston Fit, and Aramco Half Marathons, the Texas Independence Relay, and a number of 5k and 10k races. However, exercise is not the only thing into which Shannon has thrown her energy. Her educational and career accomplishments are

impressive as well – a BA in space physics from Rice University, an MS in Physics from the University of Utah, a year as a “rocket scientist” in NASA’s jet propulsion laboratory, and a CFP designation. After spending eight years as a financial planner in Utah and Washington, this sixth generation Texan found her way back to Houston to design the Enron weather derivatives trading system. Following the Enron implosion, days were spent as a financial advisor at Shepherd, Smith and Edwards and then Woodway Financial Advisors and nights were spent as a law student at the University of Houston. In 2007, Shannon graduated cum laude and joined Baker Botts, L.L.P. to work in the intellectual property law area.

Shannon, who is married to Harry “Zack” Zachau and the proud owner of a dog and two cats, appears to be living proof of the studies reporting that exercise improves time management, mental performance, and reduces stress. Many thanks for sharing your enthusiasm and knowledge to help our members succeed in the President’s Challenge. You are truly an asset to the Association of Women Attorneys!



Shannon Powers, Tiffany Star Recipient, awarding President’s Challenge certificates.

“SHANNON IS LIVING PROOF OF THE STUDIES REPORTING THAT EXERCISE IMPROVES TIME MANAGEMENT, MENTAL PERFORMANCE AND REDUCES STRESS.”

## JUDICIAL PROFILE — JUDGE AL BENNETT CONT’D

\*Continued from page 3

On the professional side, after graduation, Judge Bennett joined Fulbright & Jaworski, and later moved his practice to Solar & Fernandes before ultimately forming his own firm. There, Judge Bennett evolved into “outside general counsel” for clients, getting to know lawyers around the city who could assist his clients with a broad

array of legal services.

But the call of public service was never far from Judge Bennett’s mind. Specifically, he served the Parkwood Drive Civic Club, the HBA, HLA, and the National Bar Association while maintaining an active role in local politics. In 2008, Judge Bennett responded to the call for public service yet again and ran for, and won, the bench in the 61<sup>st</sup> District

Court. His two sons, in addition to being very proud of their father, also love the fact that their daddy works in a place where they can bang a gavel and turn on really loud microphones when no one is watching.

Judge Bennett wants his courtroom to be known for its courtesy and responsiveness to lawyers, jurors, and litigants.



Judge Al Bennett

## KEEPING UP WITH PAST PRESIDENTS — LISA ROSSMILLER

By: Caroline Marciano

It is amazing what a couple of years of law practice can do to widen one's perspective and make a lunchtime conversation even more meaningful. The last time I had the privilege of lunching with Lisa Rossmiller I was a third-year law student at the University of Houston, eager to find my place in the Houston legal community and launch into a career of my own. This time, as Lisa and I met in the eclectic and fragrant dining room of La Griglia and enjoyed the business lunch complete with fruit sorbet, I realized that I wanted our membership to know not only what Lisa has been "up to" since she was AWA President in 2001-2002, but also how her contributions to the AWA continue to resonate within our organization.

Since the time she served as AWA President, Lisa has not only expanded her career but also her family. She and her husband, Greg, will celebrate their 15<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary this year, and are the parents of three girls - Grace, 9, Ally, 7, and Sienna, 3. Ally and Sienna were born after Lisa's term as President, and all three of her daughters have been keeping her busy ever since. While Lisa continues to participate in legal organizations such as the Taxation Section of the Houston Bar Association and the Houston International Tax Forum, she is also an active member of her daughters' parent-teacher organization and enjoys being a part of their lives in that regard.



I also enjoyed hearing Lisa discuss her practice at Fulbright & Jaworski, LLP. After leaving Jenkins & Gilchrist, Lisa entered practice at Fulbright performing a plethora of tax work including advising tax-exempt organizations, international tax planning and treaty analysis, and working within international audits that touch on transfer pricing and other complex tax-related issues. Lisa has spoken on these and other tax topics to various groups and at conferences such as the Houston Bar Association's Taxation Section, the International HR Conference-Area IV SHRM, and Gulf Coast Symposium on HR issues. The complexity of her tax practice is very intriguing, and in hearing about Lisa's practice I found myself most impressed at how an organization such as the AWA can bring together women attorneys with such different practice areas and expertise to find commonality and camaraderie in the practice of law and its trials, tribulations and achievements.

Although her practice and her family take up much of her waking hours these days, Lisa remains steadfastly devoted to the AWA and what it stands for. With a gleam in her eye she reminisced about all of the wonderful events and activities she helped to plan and put on for our members. One of Lisa's very favorite events occurred when she was Chair of the AWA Foundation after her term as AWA President, and she ran the silent auction at the Foundation's annual fundraiser event. While it was a lot of work to put together, Lisa had great fun seeing the results of her efforts through not only the amount of funds raised, but also when looking at the applications of those deserving young women law students who received scholarships as a result of the Foundation's fundraising. The hurdles that the scholarship recipients faced to make it to law school amazed Lisa and she was very glad to have the chance to make a positive difference in their lives through the Foundation and the scholarships.

LISA WAS VERY GLAD TO HAVE THE CHANCE TO MAKE A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE IN LAW STUDENTS' LIVES THROUGH THE AWA SCHOLARSHIPS.

Lisa always enjoyed the many other events that the AWA sponsored in years past and she thrived on the camaraderie among the AWA members and the social activities which engaged such a wide variety of practitioners. Lisa loves the AWA for the different kinds of people that it brings together, including women who have encountered adversity, single mothers, and many others who are tough, smart and interesting people who shape the lives of each other through their experiences in life as well as in the law.

I asked Lisa what she thought would make the AWA even better than it is today, having been its leader herself not so long ago. Lisa feels it is important to preserve our organization's history through the leadership and experiences of our past presidents, and she would like to see every single past president called to our monthly meetings to share where they came from and how our organization came to be. It is important to remember the AWA's core values and these women, who helped to develop them, would be best equipped to do so. At the same time, however, Lisa would like to see the AWA expand on its original objectives and promote women in the law in ways which fit the technological and increasingly progressive times we are living in now. I believe that Lisa is one of those women who helps to expand on the AWA's original objectives, and I thank her for all that she has done for our organization.

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT—CONT'D

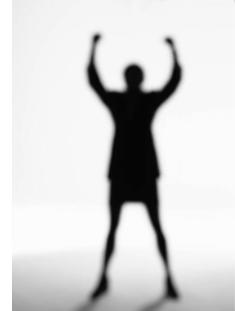
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more stress to meet demands. So I ask again, what *is* a lawyer to do? Meditation, strong family and friend support systems, proper sleep and diet, exercise, spiritual practice, and education are all ways that we can protect ourselves. In addition, the "gratitude list" recommended by Oprah and volunteer work are useful tools for gaining the perspective necessary to stay balanced.

Your bar associations and other groups are ready to provide various forms of assistance. The State Bar of Texas has added "Resources for Tough Times" on the home page of its web site. Right here in Houston, Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers holds a meeting on depression at 6:00 p.m. the first Monday of each month at the Houston Council for Alcohol and Drugs. Do not forget that the AWA provides certain resources as well. Your annual dues entitle you

to a free hour of CLE during each meeting, an opportunity to network for business referrals, and a chance to relax with peers. I encourage you, as members of the AWA, to provide each other with support by providing opportunities for listening to each other's challenges and achievements.

<sup>1</sup>The Hildebrandt Peer Monitor Economic Index tracks financial data from law firms of various sizes in 33 markets to identify trends and to measure the overall health of the industry.



## CONFERENCE WITH THE CLERK HIGHLIGHTS

By: Vivian Thames, certified paralegal, Morris, Lendais, Hollrah & Snowden

District Clerk Loren Jackson has been working diligently to achieve his motto "if you can get it in line, you should be able to get it online" to obtain information and documentation. At a Conference with the Clerk for the AWA hosted by Loren Jackson's office, Loren and his staff reviewed the exciting changes to the District Clerk's services.

Highlights of what's coming soon:

The District Clerk's office is

working to eliminate the process of going through Edocs to purchase documents online. 'One-stop only' to [www.hcdistrictclerk.com](http://www.hcdistrictclerk.com) and one will be able to view documents and purchase them.

Attorneys who sign up for docket notification will be able to view their upcoming dockets for the week (which will be sent on Saturday evening) and updates (sent during the week) regarding any changes. Attorneys would be able to view all documents relevant to a particular hearing online and via Blackberries, iPhones and other PDAs. Loren added all Conference with the

Clerk attendees to the beta testing group, so we're among the first in Harris County to test out this service.

Also, attorneys will be able to look up opposing attorneys' docket schedules so non-conflicting hearing dates may be set.

Online charges for non-certified copies will likely be 10 cents/page, and obtained via email.

In addition to the above, criminal background checks (within Harris County) will be accessible online.

VIEW AND PURCHASE DOCUMENTS AT [WWW.HCDISTRICTCLERK.COM](http://WWW.HCDISTRICTCLERK.COM)





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## MEMBERS ON THE MOVE

**Elizabeth Asher**, AWA Past President, was recently elected Chair-Elect of the HBA Animal Law Section.

**Joanne Ericksen**, AWA President-Elect, was awarded an HBA President's Award for her work this year as a co-chair of the Lawyers for Literacy Committee.

**Cameron Vann**, AWA Past President, was recently honored by the Travis County Women Lawyer's Association as Public Interest Lawyer of the Year.

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

## DON'T MISS THESE UPCOMING EVENTS...

**JUNE 24, 2009: AWA GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING** at Ouisie's Table, 3939 San Felipe. Chris Tritico, host of "The Chris Tritico Show" on KTRH and partner of Essmyer & Tritico, L.L.P., will present "Taking the 2AM Call: What Every Lawyer Should Know About DWI Arrests". The meeting begins with networking at 6:00pm followed by the presentation at 6:30pm. To RSVP, email Joanne Ericksen at [jmejoanne@yahoo.com](mailto:jmejoanne@yahoo.com).

**JULY 22, 2009: AWA GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING** at Ouisie's Table, 3939 San Felipe. Diana Velardo, a clinical instructor and Crime Victims Coordinator at UH Law Center, will present "Domestic Violence and Immigration Solutions." The meeting begins with networking at 6:00pm followed by the presentation at 6:30pm. To RSVP, email Joanne Ericksen at [jmejoanne@yahoo.com](mailto:jmejoanne@yahoo.com).

**JULY 23, 2009: COOL OFF THIS SUMMER WITH A SPINE-TINGLING PERFORMANCE AT THE ALLEY THEATRE!** Come in from the heat and enjoy the performance of "Sherlock Holmes and The Crucifer of Blood" at The Alley Theatre on Thursday, July 23<sup>rd</sup> at 7:30pm. We have reserved a block of tickets for AWA members and their family and friends. Bring your sister! Bring your husband! Bring your niece for this fun-filled theater experience that is sure to please all ages. Tickets are \$25. **RSVP by remitting payment to the Association of Women Attorneys and mail to Joanne Ericksen, c/o alliantgroup, 5400 Westheimer Court, Suite 700, Houston, Texas, 77056. Payment must be received no later than June 30.** The Alley Theatre is located downtown at 615 Texas Avenue at Prairie. In addition, for those interested in having dinner at Birraporetti's before the show, we will meet there at 6:00pm. Each individual will be responsible for the cost of their own meal.

Please RSVP for dinner to Joanne Ericksen by Monday, July 20<sup>th</sup>, so the appropriate reservation can be made. Birraporetti's is located at 500 Louisiana. If you have any questions, please contact Joanne Ericksen at [jmejoanne@yahoo.com](mailto:jmejoanne@yahoo.com).

**AUGUST 12, 2009: AWATINI 2 - THE WATERMELON CRAWL.** The AWA Foundation invites you to join us for an evening of fun, networking and watermelon surprises at Avant Garden, 411 Westheimer, from 5:30pm-7:30pm. The cost per person is \$20 in advance and \$25 at the door. To RSVP, please email [RSVP@AWAFHouston.org](mailto:RSVP@AWAFHouston.org). For more info, please visit [www.AWAFHouston.org](http://www.AWAFHouston.org). Save the date and we hope to see you there to help raise funds to support scholarships for deserving women law students!

*You are also invited to attend the following event which is not sponsored by the AWA:*

**JULY 9, 2009: TMCP NETWORKING RECEPTION.** The Texas Minority Counsel Program Houston Host Committee will be hosting a networking reception for local women, minority attorneys and in-house counsel on **July 9<sup>th</sup> at Winstead's downtown office** (1100 JPMorgan Chase Tower, 600 Travis Street). Formal invitations with specific time and RSVP information will follow. Every fall, the TMCP committee organizes and hosts a CLE and networking event that brings women and minority attorneys together with corporate legal departments and government agencies to discuss outside counsel opportunities. The program facilitates business development for women and minority attorneys with in-house counsel. This year's program will take place on September 3-4 in San Antonio. Those interested can register for the fall program on the State Bar's website.