

STATE BAR ANNUAL MEETING

This year at the State Bar Annual Meeting, the Women and the Law Section conducted a CLE panel discussion consisting of a law professor, internal medicine doctor, and lawyers who have worked part-time and in-house discussed legal ethics, law practice management, and ways to be a healthy and effective lawyer. Speakers included Elizabeth Race, M.D., MPH; Dallas; Internal Medicine/Infectious Disease, AHF Health Care Center, Medical City, Christy Jump; Dallas; Jackson Walker, Professor Deborah Calloway; Hartford, Connecticut; University of Connecticut School of Law, and Dena DeNooyer Stroh; Dallas; Murchison Oil and Gas, Inc.

The Section also selected its first Trailblazer to be spotlighted in the Women and the Law Newsletter and Website.

Trailblazer

Pat Allison has a string of “firsts” to her credit. The first person to earn a Master’s degree in Urban Studies from Washington University in 1970, Pat became the first Environmental Manager of the Houston-Galveston Area Council in 1974. In that role, she led the effort to develop the first-ever water-quality plan for the 13-county HGAC area, which funneled millions of dollars of federal grants into the region. Following this, Pat became the first women hired to practice environmental law at Fulbright & Jaworski. Credentials in environmental law quickly led to a career in oil and gas transactions. Few women practiced oil and gas law in 1980, and fewer still practiced internationally when Pat joined the law department of an independent oil company. She worked deals in Texas and numerous foreign countries and became Board Certified by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization in Oil, Gas and Mineral Law in 1988, one of the first women to earn that distinction. Pat rose in the corporate ranks, becoming Associate General Counsel-International and General Counsel.

In an effort to give back to the profession, Pat has been active in volunteer professional organizations, serving as President of the Association of International Petroleum Negotiators, an organization of 3500 members from over 80 countries. She also served as the U.S. Chapter Regional Director, VP of Education, and VP of Planning and was twice named the AIPN Member of the Year. Pat has chaired the Oil, Gas and Mineral Section of the Houston Bar Association and the Oil and Gas Practice Group of the Institute of Energy Law of the Center for American and International Law. Other activities include serving on the Council of the State Bar Corporate Counsel Section for 17 years (including the position of Chair), and serving as a Section Representative to the State Bar Board of Directors and a member of the State Bar CLE Committee. Last year State Bar President Buck Files appointed Pat to the Board of Directors of the Texas Board of Legal Specialization and she is the to be the first person Board Certified in Oil, Gas and Mineral Law to serve in that position as well as the first female Board Certified to serve.

The Women and the Law Section presented the following awards at the Annual Meeting:

Sarah T. Hughes Award

The Sarah T. Hughes award honors women attorneys who have achieved excellence in their respective fields and have: Influenced other women to pursue legal careers, or opened doors for women lawyers in a variety of Job settings the historically were closed to women, or advanced opportunities for women within a practice area or segment of the profession, or have otherwise served their profession or community in a manner that has benefitted the legal profession. You show superb leadership as a Texas lawyer, Texas Judge, Texas leader and as a woman in the profession and in your community.

Judge Nancy Atlas-Nancy F. Atlas is District Judge for the Southern District of Texas, having served more than 30 years. She was nominated by President Clinton in 1995 to be a District Judge for the Southern District of Texas, Houston Division. By 2002, she was named “trial Judge of the Year” by the Texas Civil Trial and Appellate Specialist Association. She has been appointed by the Chief Justice of the United States to Chair the judicial Security Committee of the Judicial Conference of the United States.

Justice Atlas was a Director and Shareholder at Sheinfeld, Maley & Kay P.C. and an Assistant U.S. Attorney in the Southern District of New York before her appointment. While in practice she was a pioneer of the process of ADR and was Founder, Director and Vice President of the Houston Chapter of the Association of Attorney Mediators, Member of the Advisory Board of the AA White Dispute Resolution Institute at the University of Houston, and of the Board of Advisors of the University of Texas Center for Public Policy Dispute Resolution. She has also chaired the ABA’s ADR Committee. For all of her work, she was awarded the Justice Frank Evans Award for Outstanding Service to ADR by the State Bar of Texas in 1997.

For 20 years, Justice Atlas has spearheaded a program with judges on the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals and the Southern District of Texas to facilitate appointment of skilled volunteer attorneys to handle capital habeas cases.

The individual who nominated her spoke of her in this way:

“What sets her apart from others nominated for this award and what makes this award particularly warranted for her however is not simply her considerable professional achievement and public prominence, but instead her unbounded energy, astonishing work ethic. Enthusiasm for excellence and personal and professional generosity have simply made legions of women lawyers who have had the pleasure of working with her better lawyers, better citizens and better people. She has not merely paved the way for other women lawyers success, she has steadfastly stood at curbside and cheered us on.”

Louise B. Raggio Award

Ma'at, the Egyptian goddess of justice, symbolizes truth, order, righteousness, and the emergence of order out of chaos. The Women and the Law Section established the Ma'at Justice Award in 1995 to recognize and celebrate individual attorneys or an association of attorneys who have contributed to the furtherance of justice in our society. Every year the Women and the Law Section awards the Ma'at Justice Award to an individual or organization who is actively addressing the needs and issues affecting women both in the legal profession and in the community.

This year the Section decided to change the name of the award to the Louise B. Raggio Award. Louise Raggio (June 15, 1919 – January 23, 2011) was a Texas lawyer for more than fifty years. Louise Raggio fought for the rights of women and became the first female prosecutor in Dallas County, Texas. Joining her husband, Grier Raggio, in 1956 to form the law firm, Raggio & Raggio, she began to work to change the particularly bad laws in Texas concerning women. The Marital Property Act of 1967 was Louise's best-known accomplishment. The Act helped married women to manage their own property, borrow money from banks in their own right, and establish financial discussions without having to have the presence of her husband. Before this act married women in Texas were subject to the most restrictive laws in the United States. The Marital Property Act of 1967 became the foundation for the current Texas Family Code. She was nicknamed "The Texas Tornado".

Human Rights Initiative-The organization has attorneys such as Chris Mansour, Melissa Weaver, and Martha Gonzales, who represent victims of human rights abuses seeking asylum in the US, victims of human trafficking, and victims of spousal or child abuse. It is the only agency in North Texas providing free legal services to indigent immigrant women and children who are victims of domestic violence and crime. Although three specific lawyers were nominated, we decided to give the award to the entity and not to an individual.

Melissa Weaver has been the Women and Children's Program at HRI for the last 5 years. The Program works to protect the rights of women and children who are not U.S. citizens and are the victims of Human Rights abuses, including domestic violence, violent crime, trafficking or neglect. One of her groundbreaking achievements has been in the area of obtaining Special Immigrant Juvenile Status for unaccompanied minors from Central America and Mexico. Melissa is one of Texas leading attorneys in the field.

Martha Gonzalez another nominee for HRI has led the Asylum Law Program for the last two years with an 80% affirmative asylum grant rate. Chris Mansour has headed the legal program for HRI for the last 5 years. Since 2000, HRI has trained over 770 legal professionals in these types of case. Almost 6700 hours have been donated by pro bono attorneys.

Chair Award

This was the first year for the presentation of the Chair Award by the Women and the Law Section. This award was created for the individual member of the section who assisted the Chair during her term by providing insight, guidance and assistance. The award was presented to Carolyn F. Moore. Ms. Moore is a lawyer with the Texas Department of Insurance. She was a great help and inspiration to the Chair during her term.