



## **Houston Bar Association Board of Directors Accomplishments for 2019-2020 Bar Year**

**Benny Agosto, Jr., President**

### **"Firsts" in Bar Leadership**

- First fluent bilingual president of the Houston Bar Association.
- Established the first Governance Committee to study the structure of the HBA and its ancillary organizations.
- Established the Justice Ruby K. Sondock Award to recognize outstanding women attorneys in the HBA.
- Designed and purchased HBA pins and t-shirts for leadership and staff to wear with pride in supporting their bar association.
- Established liaison with local bar leaders at HBA monthly board meetings.
- Started the first Wellness Initiative that includes CLEs dedicated to members' health and well-being, as well as a dedicated webpage that includes information to help those who need assistance getting well and those who want to stay well.
- First president to use video messages to members.
- The HBA board passed a resolution in support of an increase in filing fees for the Harris County Law Library, providing greater access to justice for all residents of the county.
- Worked with HBA executive director in hiring the HBA's first Finance Director.
- Established Diversity Awards for law firms and individuals that demonstrate outstanding commitment and accomplishments in diversity and inclusion in the legal profession.

### **Committees and Sections**

- Established the first LGBTQ+ Committee in the HBA's history.
- Sponsored a successful fundraiser to renovate the Shearn Elementary School Library and established an annual library renovation project through the Lawyers for Literacy Committee.
- Refocused the HBA Minority Opportunities in the Legal Profession Committee as the Diversity & Inclusion Committee.

- Increased focus on Section programming and established the first staff Section liaison.
- Worked with the editorial board of *The Houston Lawyer* to develop issues of the magazine on personal injury law, innovation and technology law, employment law, law practice management, and attorney wellness and well-being in the practice of law.
- Wrote six President's Messages for *The Houston Lawyer*.
- A component of the Lawyers for Literacy Program going forward will include building Little Free Libraries in underserved communities.

### **Programs**

- Held the first full-day HBA Diversity Summit for the Houston legal community.
- Held the first symposium for agencies and organizations that serve the LGBTQ community focused on law that affects the community, in partnership with The Montrose Center.
- Presented the first virtual Law Day elementary classroom reading of the book, *Bold and Brave: Ten Heroes Who Won Women the Right to Vote*, celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which was viewed over 200 times as part of the Law Week Committee's programming.
- Developing a leadership CLE series to be led by the HBA Ambassadors, 20 young, diverse members who represent the HBA at events and speak to the public about how the bar serves the profession and the community.
- Co-hosted a livestreamed Law Day webinar, organized by the San Antonio Bar, with other Texas Metro Bars.
- Raised \$11,049 in donations for the Houston Food Bank through Food from the Bar, representing 32,754 meals for hungry Houstonians.

### **Fundraising**

- Record underwriting of nearly \$874,000 for the 2019 Harvest Celebration, benefiting pro bono services through Houston Volunteer Lawyers.
- Worked with the Houston Bar Foundation leadership on the establishment of the Kay Sim Endowment for Access to Justice in Houston, to fund pro bono legal services through Houston Volunteer Lawyers in future decades.

### **COVID-19 Pandemic**

- Led the approximately 11,000-member Houston Bar Association through the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing continued service to members and enhanced legal services to the community with increasing needs.
- Directed the production and served as a presenter for the HBA's first livestream video on remote depositions in response to Stay Home, Work Safe order by

Harris County. The livestream was made available free to HBA members, as well as other local and statewide bar associations, with over 400 attendees on the livestream. The video has now been posted on the HBA website and is available at no charge, including CLE credit, for members and non-members alike.

- Revamped the LegalLine program to provide online sign up and call-backs from attorneys, to maintain the Stay Home, Work Safe mandate while continuing to serve the public with answers to legal questions and other resources.
- Participated in KPRC Ch. 2 Town Hall on legal resources for those affected by COVID-19.
- Kicked off a two-week video series, "HBA at Home," featuring HBA Ambassadors who talk about balancing work and home during stay home orders.
- Conducted media interviews in Spanish on HBA programs and other legal issues.