

Presenting the 2019-2020 HBA President's Awards

2019-2020 HBA President Benny Agosto, Jr. recognized outstanding leadership in the HBA, the legal profession and the community with President's Awards. Here are this year's recipients.

JUSTICE RUBY KLESS SONDOCK AWARD

Established by HBA President Benny Agosto, Jr. in 2019, the Justice Ruby Kless Sondock Award is presented by the HBA to a woman lawyer or judge for a record of exceptional achievement and leadership in the law. Justice Sondock, its namesake, was the first woman to serve as a district court judge in Harris County and the first woman to serve on the Texas Supreme Court, among many other honors during her long, and continuing, career. This year, the HBA is proud to recognize two outstanding women.

Lynne Liberato



Lynne Liberato, a partner in the appellate practice section at Haynes and Boone LLP, was the first woman to serve as president of the Houston Bar Association in 1993-94 and the third of six female presidents of the State Bar of Texas. She is the recipient of the Houston Bar Association Auxiliary's Leon Jaworski Award for public service; the


Karen H. Susman Award for Exceptional Commitment to Equality, Justice, Fairness and Community Service; and the Texas Bar Foundation's Gregory S. Coleman Outstanding Texas Appellate Lawyer Award. Ms. Liberato has been the only practicing lawyer to chair the United Way's Community Campaign and has also served as chair of its board of trustees. She also chaired the United Way Hurricane Harvey Recovery Task Force and was named United Way's Volunteer of the Year. She has served as president of the Texas Supreme Court Historical Society and as longtime editor of its journal, a publication she started. She also served as editor in chief of *The Houston Lawyer* and is well-known as the co-author, with Judge David Hittner, of "Summary Judgments in Texas: State and Federal," which is published every four years, most recently by South Texas College of Law Houston. Recently, Ms. Liberato was appointed by the State Bar of Texas to serve on the newly established Texas Commission on Judicial Selection, a 15-person commission established by the Texas legislature to study the state's system of selecting judges and make recommendations to the legislature.

Hon. Alice Oliver Parrott

Judge Alice Oliver-Parrott has had a long and distinguished career as a trial lawyer, trial judge, Chief Justice of the First Court of Appeals, and now, mediator and arbitrator. Consistently, listed in Best Lawyers in America and as a *Texas Monthly* "Super Lawyer," Judge Oliver-Parrott has received numerous awards including the 2019 Lifetime of Excellence in Advocacy Award from the Texas Association of Civil Trial and Appellate Specialists, Outstanding Civil Trial Judge (TACTAS), the Texas Trial Lawyer of the Year by the Texas Chapters



of the American Board of Trial Advocates, MVP of the Houston Chapter of the American Board of Trial Advocates and the Outstanding Young Lawyer of Texas by the State Bar of Texas. As president of the Houston Chapter, and then as president of the Texas Chapter of the American Board of Trial Advocates, she has continuously

championed the 7th Amendment and civility among lawyers. Dedicated to trial and appellate advocacy for 45 years, Judge Oliver-Parrott has presented in continuing legal education programs for over 20 law schools, the State Bar of Texas, and numerous professional associations. In 1976, on behalf of the Houston Young Lawyers Association, she co-chaired the first national mock trial competition ever held for law students. She is a contributing author to the book, *Texas Business Litigation*, published by American Lawyer Media, and is a Life Fellow in the Texas Bar Foundation, the Houston Bar Foundation and in the American Board of Trial Advocates Foundation. 


JUSTICE EUGENE A. COOK PROFESSIONALISM AWARD

The Justice Eugene A. Cook Professionalism Award is presented by the Houston Bar Association to a lawyer or judge who exemplifies the highest level of professionalism and legal ethics. Justice Cook, the award's namesake, is a former Justice of the Texas Supreme Court and former HBA President who helped write the Texas Lawyers Creed and is known for his lifetime of exemplary service in the areas of professionalism, legal ethics and legal excellence. This year, the HBA is proud to honor a former president of the HBA and the State Bar of Texas.

Kelly Frels



Kelly Frels now serves of counsel at Bracewell LLP, a firm where he has practiced since 1970 and where he served in leadership roles that included managing partner. He served as president of the HBA in 1994-95 and as president of the State Bar of Texas in 2004-05. Mr. Frels also served on the State Bar Board of Directors and in leadership roles on numerous State Bar and HBA committees. In 2009-10, he chaired the Texas Center for Legal Ethics. Recognized as one of the premier school law attorneys in the nation, Mr. Frels was president of the National Organization on Legal Problems of Education; and chair of the National and Texas School Board Associations, Councils of School Attorneys. He is the recipient of the Texas Bar Foundation's Dan Rugeley Price Memorial Award for legal writing and volunteerism; the Houston Bar Association Auxiliary's Leon Jaworski Award for community service; and the Chairman's Inaugural

Award for Lifetime Achievement from the National School Boards Association, Council of School Attorneys. He is the namesake for the State Bar of Texas Kelly Frels Lifetime Achievement Award from the School Law Section. 

DIVERSITY AWARDS

The Diversity Awards were created by 2019-2020 HBA President Benny Agosto, Jr. to recognize outstanding achievements by law offices and individuals in the areas of diversity, inclusion and equality in the legal profession. "Our first recipients of the Diversity Awards set the standard for those who excel in this crucial mission going forward," Agosto said.

Each recipient is honored not only for recent accomplishments in promoting diversity, but for longtime dedication to the principles of equality.

Inaugural Recipients of the HBA Diversity Awards



Vinson & Elkins LLP



Harris County

District Attorney's Office

Benny Agosto with Hon. Kim Ogg,
Harris County District Attorney



Travis Torrence

PRESIDENT'S AWARDS FOR COMMITTEES AND SECTIONS

Continuing Legal Education



Stacey E. Burke



Rick Anderson

Stacey Burke of Stacey E. Burke P.C. and Rick Anderson of Roberts Markel Weinberg Butler Hailey, P.C. lead a committee that planned 182.75 hours of MCLE programming this year, including 57 hours of ethics credit, including seminars, lunch and learn programs, and institutes. The committee also worked with other HBA committees, sections, and outside organizations on CLE programs, resulting in the HBA providing 431.5 hours of MCLE credit this year, including 111.5 hours of ethics credit, continuing the history of CLE as the HBA's top member benefit. When Stay Home orders were issued, the committee quickly pivoted to webinars, to continue to provide innovative programming available to members 24/7.

- The CLE Committee planned and executed the HBA's first Diversity Summit, held July 11 at South Texas College of Law Houston. The Summit brought together attorneys, judges, and corporate counsel to discuss topics including implicit bias, understanding the gender spectrum, the business side of diversity & inclusion, the importance of allyship, and hiring and retaining a diverse workforce. The CLE committee also created and co-sponsored the first LGBTQ+ Symposium on legal issues for organizations that provide services to the LGBTQ community.

- The CLE Committee also developed and implemented the HBA Wellness Initiative, including live classes and webinars on yoga and meditation, a celebration of National Lawyer Wellness Week, and a Wellness page on the HBA website with videos, articles and other resources.

Gender Fairness Committee



Emery Gullickson Richards, Kristin Kruse Lotz and Marissa Marquez

Emery Gullickson Richards of Blank Rome LLP, Kristin Kruse Lotz of Daniels & Tredennick, and Marissa Marquez of Legacy Community Health, along with their dedicated committee, planned and executed a year of outstanding programs focusing on women and equality in the legal profession, before the COVID-19 pandemic forced the postponement of two highly anticipated spring programs. In addition, they led a successful campaign that resulted in more than 90 law firms and corporations signing set for to the HBA's Commitment Statement promoting equity for women in law practices.

- In the fall the committee, in partnership with the Houston Chapter of the Federal Bar Association, presented a panel on "The Disappearing Female Lawyer and the Case for Change" on Sept. 17, and on November 7, "Bold and Accomplished—Effective Self-Promotion Tactics." In February, the committee organized a successful Speed Mentoring Program, where women attorneys in practice less than five years had the opportunity to network with experienced attorneys and judges.
- The committee pivoted to virtual programming for the upcoming management briefing on "Practical Tools and Information for Gender Equality in the Legal Profession," on June 30 and "Business Development for Women: How to Overcome Obstacles and Thrive" on September 29.

John J. Eikenburg Law Week Fun Run



Steven Howard, Brooksie Bonvillain Boutet and Alex Kamel

Planning for the annual Fun Run is a year-round project, and co-chairs Steven Howard of Steven Howard PC, Brooksie Bonvillain Boutet of Shipley Snell Montgomery LLP, and Alex Kamel of Vinson & Elkins LLP led a committee that worked tirelessly to organize and execute a successful event in February.

- The committee raised the second highest amount in sponsorships in the 35 years of the Fun Run, bringing in over \$77,000. Despite unavoidable increases in expenses, the event resulted in a donation of more than \$65,000 to The Center for Pursuit, which promotes the pursuit of choice, growth, and personal independence for adults with

intellectual and developmental disabilities.

- The committee increased participation by runners and walkers, restructured the post-race party, added a registration challenge and finisher medals, and utilized a new volunteer portal to increase participation for the event.

Lawyers for Literacy



Alvin Adjei



Karan Ciotti



Chanler Langham

Co-chaired by Alvin Adjei of Burritt Adjei PLLC, Karan Ciotti of Ciotti Law, and Chanler Langham of Susman Godfrey LLP, the committee organized a successful book drive and recruited 81 donors to contribute 10,339 books that were distributed to 44 community organizations.

- The committee worked with 2019-2020 HBA President Benny Agosto to raise \$30,000 to fund a new library for Shearn Elementary School, providing students with books, shelving and furnishings in a welcoming atmosphere that promotes reading and learning. The committee also developed a plan to build four Little Free Libraries in underserved communities. Both of these were new projects that the committee took on in addition to regular programming.
- The Committee recruited attorneys to read the book, *What Do You Do with a Voice Like That?* to over 8,600 young students in 101 schools in eight districts for Constitution Day, teaching them about the contributions of Congresswoman Barbara Jordan.

LGBTQ+ Committee



Hon. Kim Ogg, Hon. Daryl Moore and Hon. Steven Kirkland

Harris County District Attorney Kim Ogg, Judge Daryl Moore of the 334th District Court and Judge Steven Kirkland of the 333rd District Court were the inaugural co-chairs of the HBA's first LGBTQ+ Committee.

- One of the first tasks of the new committee was to develop a mission statement to guide its purpose and programming: Established in 2019, the mission of the HBA LGBTQ+ Committee is to exemplify professionalism and to improve the practice of law through inclusion of different perspectives and the participation of LGBTQ+ attorneys and allies.
- The committee held a successful law student mixer, organized a well-attended networking event for LGBTQ lawyers and allies, sponsored a speed mentoring event, created a Coaching Circles mentorship program, and produced newsletters. The committee also was instrumental in developing, with the HBA CLE Commit-

tee, the HBA's first LGBTQ Community Legal Symposium, held at The Montrose Center and attended by representatives of dozens of service organizations.

Taunya Painter, *The Houston Lawyer*



Taunya Painter, a principal attorney in Painter Law Firm, served as editor in chief of *The Houston Lawyer*, guiding a 30-member editorial board in producing six outstanding issues.

- The September-October issue focused on employment law, while the November-December issue examined for the first time Houston's practice in innovation and technology law.
- The January-February issue had an emphasis on personal injury law, while March-April featured developments in law practice management.
- This May-June issue is the first to focus on lawyers' well-being, including articles on dealing with stress in a pandemic, addiction and grievances, secondary traumatic stress, suicide, law firm wellness programs and other topics.

Ed Burdzinski, Corporate Counsel Section



Chaired by Ed Burdzinski of Clark Hill Strasburger, the HBA Corporate Counsel Section led the way in helping its members through working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was the first HBA section to hold its meetings via webinar.

- The section is always willing to share its expertise with members of other HBA sections, inviting them to attend the Corporate Counsel Section programs and network with attorneys from all practices.
- The section also was the first to hold its council election electronically, and the section contributes to the community through an annual donation to the Harvest Celebration, benefiting pro bono legal services for low-income people in Harris County.

Kelly Fritsch, Family Law Section



Chaired by Kelly Fritsch, attorney at law, the HBA Family Law Section provides much-needed assistance for programs throughout the year, including providing a family law specialist for every HBA LegalLine program. Section members also volunteer for Houston Volunteer Lawyers legal clinics and serve as mentors to other attorneys so they can handle family law cases pro bono.

- The section updated the HBA's Family Law Handbook and created a number of free Zoom CLE programs for the family law bar, to assist with remote law practice. The section also contributed family law resources for the HBA's COVID Updates web page and maintains contact with its members to update them on the status of the courts.
- The section champions a number of community programs, including an annual Teddy Bear drive for CPS, adopting the Domestic Relations Visitor Center, and contributing donations to the Harvest Celebration, Habitat, Do the Write Thing, and the Eikenburg Law Week Fun Run.