United Way of Greater Houston Awards Lynne Liberato 'Rare' Honor

By Lynne Liberato | April 25, 2019

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The United Way of Greater Houston has appointed Haynes Boone Partner Lynne Liberato as Board Trustee Emeritus in recognition of her longtime contributions to the organization and its most significant initiatives.

She is only the second person in the history of the United Way to receive the title, joining Scott McLean, president of Zions Bancorporation and former CEO of Amegy Bank.

“Conferring the honor of Board Trustee Emeritus is very rare. But then, so is Lynne Liberato,” said Marc Watts, immediate past chair of the United Way of Greater Houston, who presented the honor to Liberato at the group’s annual meeting on April 23.

While noting that “Lynne’s contributions to the United Way are too many to list,” Watts outlined some of her achievements:

- Chair of every disaster recovery task force, from Tropical Storm Allison through Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Ike and Harvey
- Chair of the Board of Trustees and Executive Committee
- Chair and co-creator of the THRIVE initiative, which provides low-income Houston families with financial education, career counseling and free tax preparation, among other services
- Chair of the 2013-14 Annual Community Campaign that helped raise $83.7 million, the largest campaign in the group’s history. She was the only practicing lawyer ever to serve in that role.

“Lynne is a remarkable volunteer and an invaluable asset to the United Way of Greater Houston,” said Watts, president of The Friedkin Group. He also outlined the criteria for appointment to this position, which includes whether the organization would have existed or been positioned in the community without her and whether the person has created a legacy that will last for years or even decades.

Liberato has been a United Way volunteer since the mid-1990s but took a break in 2000 after being elected president of the State Bar of Texas. Once she returned to the board in 2003, her work never stopped and her commitment never wavered.

“Honestly, I never meant to be quite as involved as I have been in the work of the United Way,” Liberato said. “But, between my growing expertise in social services and disaster recovery, my witness to the critical value provided by the United Way and the unrelenting support of Haynes Boone, I could not manage to say ‘no.’”

She notes proudly that her partner, Jesse Gelsomini, head of the Houston office’s employee benefits group, was elected to the board of trustees at the same meeting in which she was recognized. Gelsomini, who co-headed the Houston office’s United Way campaign, was elected to a three-year term.

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A partner in the Appellate Practice Group, Liberato has helped her group earn nationwide recognition. The Texas Bar Foundation selected her as the 2019 winner of the Gregory S. Coleman Outstanding Appellate Lawyer Award, which annually celebrates one distinguished appellate lawyer who has an outstanding practice and demonstrates a commitment to mentoring young attorneys and providing legal services to the underserved.

In 2018, Texas First Lady Cecilia Abbott awarded Liberato a Certificate of Appreciation for her role in disaster recovery on behalf of the United Way of Greater Houston. Also last year, the Women and the Law Section of the State Bar of Texas named Liberato the winner of the Louise B. Raggio Award, which recognizes an attorney who has actively addressed the needs and issues of women in the legal profession and the community.

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