

Dallas Bar Foundation's 52 Years of Creating Cycles of Success in Our Legal Community

A wise mentor can impact our future in ways that even our parents, coaches and closest friends cannot. The most influential mentor of my legal career was Justice James A. Baker, a former Texas Supreme Court justice and the 2008 Chair of the Fellows of the Dallas Bar Foundation (“DBF”). He was a student of the law and he modeled a tireless work ethic and valued excellent, thorough and understandable writing. Equally important to him though was how well his team developed as professionals in our community.

Texas lost one of its most respected legal leaders when Justice Baker passed away on June 22, 2008. To honor Justice Baker’s remarkable, 50-year legal career, the Dallas Bar Foundation established an internship with the Chief Justice at the Supreme Court of Texas. The DBF awarded the first Justice James A. Baker Clerkship in 2009. I know Justice Baker would smile knowing that the DBF is valuing the same things he loved—mentoring young lawyers, sharpening legal skills, championing professionalism, and being fully-engaged in community service.

Justice Baker would also smile to see how the DBF’s impact has continued to grow since its inception in



1971. Indeed, the Dallas Bar Foundation’s identity over the last 52 years has evolved from its initial focus of purchasing the formerly-named Belo Mansion to serve as the Legal Education Center, to being a change agent for law students and grant recipients. The DBF was originally established in 1971 for educational and charitable purposes to: (1) sponsor and encourage research, publications, institutes and forums for the furtherance of justice under the law; (2) establish scholarships and otherwise promote the study of law and research and the continuing education of lawyers; (3) institute and maintain legal aid facilities for the indigent; and, (4) accept aid, donations and grants from government and private sources. In 1977, the DBF included another charitable purpose: to

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preserve historical structures, display historical memorabilia and conduct historical observances. The DBF thereafter accepted donations for the 1977 purchase of the Belo Mansion and for the Mansion Expansion initiative that followed in 2000.

So, how does the DBF put its mission into practice today? The DBF's Executive Director, Elizabeth Philipp, says, "The Dallas Bar Foundation, through its scholarships, clerkships and grant programs, helps create cycles of success in our community from which we all benefit." The Sarah T. Hughes Diversity Scholarships is a primary example of a DBF program creating cycles of success. The DBF has awarded \$2.78 million to Hughes Scholars since 1982. Many of the Hughes Scholars are first generation college graduates who are now leaders in our community providing their families and their communities opportunities not afforded to them. These Scholars thankfully continue to serve our community.

In 1989, the DBF initiated the William E. Collins Clerkships, which provides high-achieving, minority law students a summer clerkship. The DBF has awarded \$667,000 in Collins Clerkships. Collins clerkship alums include: Laura Benitez Geisler, partner at Sommerman, McCaffity, Quesada & Geisler, LLP and the first Hispanic Dallas Bar President; Nicole Munoz Huschka, an attorney at Figari+Davenport, LLP and current president of the Dallas Association of Young Lawyers; and, Hope Shimabuku, the Director of the Texas Regional U.S. Patent and Trademark Office and a mentor of a Hughes Scholar at the USPTO. The Hughes Scholars and Collins Clerks were leaders in law school and continue to be change agents.

The DBF, as a charitable, fundraising arm of the DBA, also awards grants to support educational programs like the High School Mock Trial program, which the DBF awarded \$477,668 in the last 30

years. Two current Hughes Scholars participated on their high school mock trial teams and one won the state championship. One Hughes Scholar said competing in the High School Mock Trial competition at the DBA for three years inspired him to start a second foreign language debate team when he was an undergraduate at Princeton.



The DBF's Collins Clerkships and grant-giving has come full circle for Laura Benitez Geisler. Ms. Geisler, a current DBF Trustee and chair of the grants committee said, "My involvement with the DBF began as a law student when I was selected for the Collins Clerkship which provided me the opportunity to intern at the Texas Supreme Court. As Dallas Bar President, the DBF was instrumental in helping me launch a legal incubator program for lawyers seeking to serve a modest-means clientele, and in the four years since the program's inception, program participants have provided more than 6000 hours of pro bono service. Now as a DBF Trustee leading our grants committee, I have the privilege of helping select scholarship and grant recipients, personally knowing the positive impact it will have on the beneficiaries."

Kathleen LaValle, President and CEO of Dallas CASA, can also attest to the impact of the DBF. Ms. LaValle said: "For more than 30 years, the Dallas Bar Foundation has supported Dallas CASA and the work of our professionally supervised, court-appointed volunteer advocates



who can be a lifeline for children in foster care. The Foundation has recognized Dallas CASA's critical role in protecting children and restoring childhood. As a career-long member of the DBA and a Dallas CASA board member since 2002, I take pride in the Foundation investing in our mission and supporting the growth of our program capacity to serve all children in need."

Former DBF Chair, Kim Askew, DLA Piper LLP, said, "Serving as Chair of the DBF has been a highlight of my service to the Bar and community. From scholarships and internships to legal aid for the poor and historic preservation through the Arts District Mansion, the DBF significantly impacts the profession and community – its reach is deep. I am especially proud of the DBF's support of the Bob Mow Judicial Internship, which honors my former mentor and law partner. Students enjoy the internship, and working with the judges of the NDTX has truly enhanced their careers and personal development. Plus, Bob would be pleased that the DBF continues to promote the legal excellence and professionalism that he modeled throughout his life and practice."

Each year since 1995, the DBF has selected an attorney to receive the prestigious DBF Fellows Award (now DBF Fellows Justinian Award). These

lawyers have distinguished themselves as having made an extraordinary contribution through their professional achievements in an area of the law and in their service to the legal profession.

The DBF's efforts are only possible because of generous individual donors, the DBF Fellows, law firms and companies sponsoring our special events. The DBF is proud to have 1,200 DBF Fellows whose dues help the Foundation's ability to fund scholarships and award community grants.

The DBF exemplifies everything my mentor, Justice Baker, would champion. We are lawyers who are passionate about investing in our future leaders, are committed to service and to supporting programs dedicated to furthering justice under the law.

Tricia DeLeon

DBF Chair 2023
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