



## President's Column

# State Bar Update

BY BILL MATEJA

Special contribution by Paul K. Stafford.

### A Mandatory (and More Relevant) State Bar

In May, I attended the State Bar of Texas (SBOT) Swearing-In Ceremony for those who passed the February 2024 Bar Exam. Upon reciting an oath to 'honestly demean oneself in the practice of law', these newly licensed attorneys joined the approximately 114,000 active members of the SBOT. An agency of the Texas judicial branch created through the 1939 State Bar Act, the State Bar of Texas is mandatory, unified, and self-governing. The State Bar's attorney members are unique among professionals in Texas—with lawyers permitted to vote on such matters as selecting the leaders of their own regulatory body (the SBOT Board of Directors), determining the disciplinary rules that govern lawyers' professional conduct in an independent grievance system, and establishing the dues lawyers pay for the right to practice law in Texas.

The State Bar's mission is to support the administration of the legal system, assure all citizens equal access to justice, foster high standards of ethical conduct for lawyers, enable its members to better serve their clients and the public, educate the public about the rule of law, and promote diversity in the administration of justice and the practice of law. But, besides its membership being mandatory to practice in this state, what does the State Bar of Texas offer attorneys—newly licensed or seasoned—and why should its mandatory members care?

As a preliminary matter, staying connected in the profession is a key to success, and SBOT members (and the public) can stay connected in a variety of ways, including through the Texas Bar Journal, the SBOT blog, its social media and podcasts, as well as through [www.texasbar.com](http://www.texasbar.com).

Many of the State Bar's members may already be aware of the SBOT's numerous benefits. They, and others, may also be aware that an important aspect of practicing law (and of life, generally) is having a mentor. Given that approximately 22 percent of SBOT attorneys are solo practitioners, and another 15 percent work in firms of 2-5 attorneys, many of these newly licensed attorneys will work in solo or small firms. Upon licensure, newly licensed attorneys can participate in the State Bar's "Ten Minute Mentor" mentoring program and are often encouraged to become members of the Texas Young Lawyers Association, with such programs as "How Texas Courts Work" and the "Civility Hub".

Lawyers also realize that the practice of law involves much more than just the practice of law. The SBOT offers many services (including free legal research for all members through Fastcase), and members benefits (including insurance, finance, technology, office supplies, and business travel). The SBOT also offers Law Practice Management resources to assist attorneys in running a law practice ([www.texasbarpractice.com](http://www.texasbarpractice.com)) and with cessation of practice and succession planning. A new cessation program created by committee offers a toolkit and video presentations to help with such planning (<https://blog.texasbarpractice.com/videos/tag/succession-planning>).

When ethical questions arise in the practice, the SBOT's Ethics Helpline is only an email or phone call away. Consistent with Minimum Continuing Legal Education requirements, SBOT members can utilize TexasBarCLE ([www.texasbarcle.com](http://www.texasbarcle.com)) for free online class offerings, webcasts, video courses, archived titles, and an online library. When the time comes to hand-off or to shut-down a practice, the SBOT also promotes succession and cessation planning, and custodial attorney designation. And in that eventual moment when lawyers are feeling shutdown professionally or personally, the SBOT offers confidential assistance focused on lawyer well-being through such programs as the Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program (TLAP) ([www.tlaphelps.org](http://www.tlaphelps.org)).

Attorneys also give back to the profession and to the community through the State Bar's numerous Sections, Divisions, and Committees. The State Bar also publishes legal educational pamphlets for the public and provides resources to train teachers through Social Studies Research and Curriculum Development ("Texas Civics").

One of the defined purposes of the State Bar Act relates to encouraging the formation and activities of local bar associations—like the Dallas Bar Association. While wit-



Paul K. Stafford

## All Hail the State Bar of Texas' New Chair – Paul Stafford

I'm proud to report that just last week at the State Bar of Texas Annual Meeting here in Dallas, the State Bar Board of Directors installed Dallas' own Paul Stafford as its Chair. I not only want to congratulate Paul on this achievement, but thank him in advance for his service and for his continuing and life-long service to the Bar. Many of you will recall that Paul was a terrific President of the Dallas Bar Association not that many years ago. I also want to wish Paul the best of luck because leading the State Bar of Texas is not the easiest thing to do, something I learned when I served on its Board and Executive Committee from 1996-1999. Someone is always gunning for the State Bar whether it's about self-governance, germaneness, dues, lawyer discipline or any one of a number of other issues.

That Paul has become the new SBOT Board Chair shouldn't come as a surprise because Dallas Bar members have answered the leadership "bell" numerous times. By my count, ten (10) members of our Bar have served as SBOT Presidents since just 1940, namely: Angus Wynne 1939-40, John Bickett 1945-46, Robert Storey 1948-49, Glenn Turner 1952-53, Paul Carrington 1960-61, Morris Harrell 1970-71, Darrell Jordan 1990-91, Harriett Miers 1992-93, Betsy Whitaker 2003-04, and Frank Stevenson 2016-17. What a distinguished list, and even those you might not recognize were rock stars in their day. Take John Bickett who was a Court of Appeals judge and later General Counsel of Southwestern Bell. Paul Storey was Dean of SMU Law but not before he was a prosecutor during the Nuremberg trials. Paul Carrington was a driving force behind Carrington Coleman.

Dallas has also produced numerous Chairs including most recently Chad Baruch and Jerry Alexander, two of the more heralded and beloved chairs that the State Bar has ever had.

Not only is this a shout out for Paul, but I also thought I'd make the point that is so self-evident that it's not—that Dallas lawyers care deeply about the State Bar because the State Bar is something that we should all care deeply about, even though most simply take it for granted.

Our State Bar and its leadership have been zealous guardians of our privilege and intent to govern ourselves and not leave the Bar's governance to the government or politicians. And make no mistake that there have been repeated attempts to strip that privilege away from Texas lawyers. I don't have the room here to expound but suffice it to say that I can't imagine anyone would want the practice of law to be government by those who haven't walked a mile in our shoes and knows what's like to practice law.

So, here's to Paul, here's to the State Bar and here's to the privilege afforded us as Texas lawyers to govern ourselves.

Good luck, Paul!

nessing the oath to 'honestly demean' being administered to the next generation of Texas lawyers, I was reminded of the same oath I took 30 years prior. As a Dallas Director on the State Bar Board of Directors, I am reminded of a State Bar that is progressively inclusive, that has evolved into a collaborative governing body that is more diverse than divisive. As the incoming Chair of the State Bar Board of Directors, I am reminded of those affiliated with the Dallas Bar who preceded me—including Chairs Betsy Whitaker, Kim Askew, William D. Elliot, Travis Vanderpool, Beverly Godbey, Frank Stevenson, Jerry Alexander, and Chad Baruch. I am also respectful of, and grateful, for this contextual moment in the State Bar's history and my own. I look forward to continuing to make your mandatory State Bar more relevant to you.

Paul K. Stafford



## HEADNOTES

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2101 Ross Avenue  
Dallas, Texas 75201  
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Fax: (214) 220-7465  
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