



## President's Column

# What Are You Grateful For?

## Me: The Dallas Bar Association – The Best in the U.S. – Bar None!

BY BILL MATEJA

*“When I started counting my blessings, my whole life turned around.” - Willie Nelson*

### Gratitude

Fresh off the Thanksgiving holiday, I sure hope all of you had a chance to enjoy the holiday and give thanks. At its core, Thanksgiving is about **gratitude**. And **gratitude** is precisely what I want to talk about because the time has come for me to express gratitude as I ride off into the sunset as Dallas Bar President. There is much to be grateful for. But before I express mine, I'd like Dallas attorneys to consider two things about this virtue—**gratitude**—which Cicero once proclaimed was “not only the greatest virtue, but the parent of all others.”

First, as I noted in my October column, please consider being more intentional about expressing gratitude because it makes us all less self-focused and more focused on those around us which is a hallmark of truly humble people—with humility being an essential trait of good lawyering as I opined then. Coincidentally, our State Bar President Steve Benesh, mentions in his November '24 President's column that:

[P]racticing gratitude can have beneficial effects on our own health and well-being, which can positively impact our legal practices. We all know that the practice of law is frequently stressful, difficult, and demanding. But by taking opportunities to reflect on our blessings and express our appreciation to others, we shift our focus from the negative aspects of our jobs to the positive elements of our practices, which can improve our outlook, enhance our attitudes, reduce our stress, and enrich our job satisfaction.

Second, especially during this holiday season, please think about what are you grateful for. Your clients? Your law firm or law office? Mentors? Colleagues? Staff? Your legal assistant? Opposing counsel? Co-Counsel? Judges and their staffs? Friends that are lawyers? The Dallas Bar? The profession? Or, simply the opportunity to practice law? Perhaps it's all of the above. Think about it and act on it. It will make you a better lawyer. It will make you happier and more fulfilled.

### What I'm Grateful For

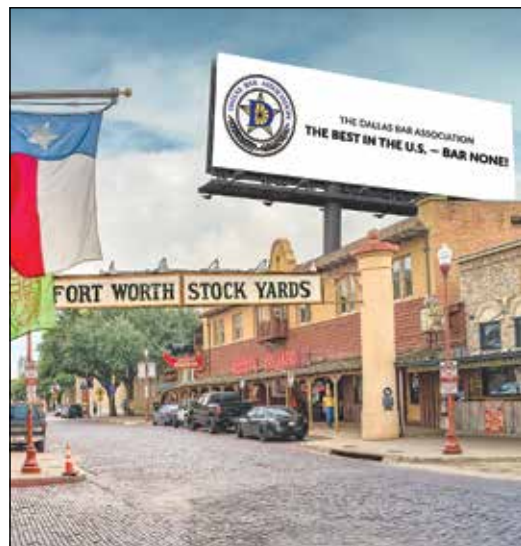
Among many things, I'm thankful to the Dallas Bar, its members and its staff because it's been a joy to be at the DBA's helm this past year. Like anything, it's a joy when you get to work with the best, and the Dallas Bar is the best. This last year, I felt like what I imagine Manager Joe Torre felt like when he was guiding the NY Yankees to four World Series championships in five years with the likes of Derek Jeter and Mariano Rivera. Because the DBA has the best talent—both lawyers and staff—I felt not just joy but also an amazing sense of accomplishment and excellence, to wit:

### Dallas Bar Members and Staff – in 2024, Because of You –

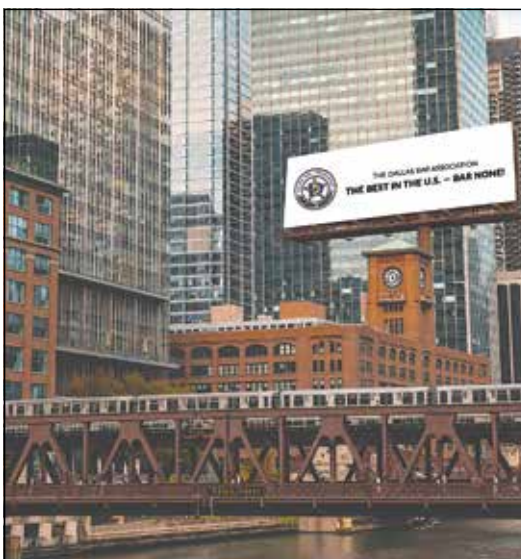
- DVAP closed 4,557 cases (6.7% increase over last year; placed 768 cases with volunteer attorneys (2.8% increase); recruited 372 attorneys and 402 support staff with over 1,700 volunteers assisting at DVAP clinics (5.2% increase).
- Our LegalLine registered 2,699 individuals matching 1,610 of them with attorneys (average of 11-13 volunteer attorneys monthly).
- Our Lawyer Referral Service answered 13,778 calls, referred 10,443 matters to attorneys and raised \$161,635 in income.
- Our Equal Access to Justice Campaign benefitting DVAP raised over \$1.4 million—a new, all-time high.
- Our Equality Committee didn't just talk a good game, it executed—whether it was its privilege walk, Book Club, DEI Toolkit, or many other endeavors.
- 146 schools participated in our 46th Texas High School Mock

Trial Competition this last year including 53 local schools—requiring over 600 attorneys and law students to judge including 205 locally. Our 2024 State Champion—Booker T. (DISD)—placed 2nd at Nationals!

- Our Sections put on over 400 substantive legal presentations.
- Our Home Project Committee built its 34th home in partnership with Habitat for Humanity (longest-running Habitat sponsor) and the DBA is responsible for 39 homes in total.



Fort Worth



Chicago

- Our lawyers heeded the call to “Get Back” to the Dallas Bar, to the Bench Bar Conference, to Bar None, and to our beautiful Arts District Mansion, a facility like none other.

- Speaking of “Getting Back,” our lawyers gathered as friends and colleagues at a myriad of events which included new ones like Barristers and Baseball, the St. Patty's Day Party, and the investiture of Judge **Irma Ramirez**.

- Our Food From the Bar Campaign assisted the North Texas Food Bank by providing over 500,000 meals, raising \$167,000 and involving over 100 volunteers.

- We put on cutting-edge programming such as the first AI Symposium, the “Go-Getters” Series, and Law Day's fireside chat with the DHS Undersecretary of Intelligence and Analysis.

- Our Board took Project Unity and Together We Dine to Louisville where we lunched with students from Central High School and discussed hard topics around race relations in the spirit of what unites us is greater than what divides us.

- Our managing partners from well over the 100 largest firms in Dallas came together to collaborate and learn from one another.

- Our Affiliate Bar Associations worked collaboratively like in no other year.

While this list is somewhat exhausting, it's invigorating. And it is only the tip of the iceberg as to what the DBA did this last year.

There are a number of people to whom I'm also **extremely** grateful, but I'm not going to try and list everyone because the list is long and, invariably, I'd inadvertently leave someone out. **If you think you're on that list, know that you are—thank you!** I will say, however, that **Alicia Hernandez**, our executive director, has to be the best in the country. Selfless, loyal, hard-working, and strategic are just a few of the adjectives that describe her. Our Dallas Bar is in good hands. Thank you, Alicia.

### The DBA: The Best Bar Association in the U.S. – Bar None!

Just as I'm grateful for my family and love to brag on them whenever I can, I want to brag on the DBA. I want to shout it from the rafters and trumpet it far and wide. So, as my final presidential act—an act of gratitude—I've authorized a DBA marketing campaign to brag on the DBA as the best bar association in the U.S. It's an ambitious campaign and couldn't have been possible without anonymous funding. Start looking for our advertisements this January in major cities throughout Texas and the U.S. Two mock ups are included here. When you go by these billboards, take pride in your Dallas Bar Association and be grateful that you're a member of the best bar association in the country!<sup>1</sup>

### So Long...

I'll keep it short, in part, because our terrific *Headnotes* Editor, **Jessica Smith**, tells me I'm at my word limit. Simply put, it's been a swell ride this last year. Thank you for the opportunity. Please continue to **Get Back** to the Dallas Bar and best of luck to **Vicki Blanton** in 2025!

1. If you're reading this footnote, I think it's fair to assume that, for at least a nanosecond, you thought I might be telling the truth ....

## HEADNOTES

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