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# COMING FULL CIRCLE

Today marks a coming of full circle for me – a seven-year journey on the KBA Board of Governors. Active participation in the bar association came a bit later in my career. When my children were very young, as a single mother, I chaired a committee but otherwise jealously guarded my time with them. When it seemed appropriate to divide my time further, I jumped headlong into more committee work – at times participating in as many as 9 committees. I might have spread myself a bit too thin. There is something to be said for quality over quantity.

Bar service came to mean more than I first gave it credit for, however. Admittedly, I approached it rather selfishly, viewing it as a way for me to create or strengthen professional relationships as a means of advancing my career. After all, they say one of your best referral sources will be other lawyers. What I did not anticipate was the resulting personal satisfaction. Those “other lawyers,” I learned, are my colleagues in the truest sense of the word – my allies and fellow travelers working in the trenches to protect our freedoms in so many different ways while wearing the common mantle of the most noble profession. We walk very distinctive, yet markedly similar paths.

I discovered through active engagement, the operative word and that which has given me the greatest satisfaction in bar involvement is “service.” Events like Band Together raising more than \$16,000 for the KBA Habitat House, swinging a hammer on those houses, Saturday morning Bars, Lawyerpalooza, the Supreme Court Dinner, mock trial, and the annual meeting, showcased to my children how lawyers do amazing things, are generous, and are servants to our clients, communities, families, one another, and the law itself. Borrowing from Vicki Clark, who is a true servant leader and advocate for inclusion, as she spoke of mankind, we are each a thread in this beautiful tapestry of our profession.

Some of you know I approached this day with some trepidation for more than a year. What could I possibly say or write that my colleagues want to hear? In what theme should I cloak the coming year? Again, it returns full circle. I feel grounded in three things particularly resting on my heart for 2019. These are that same servant leadership, a return to southern civility in these seemingly rancorous times, and fighting for our communities and one another in the face of the opioid epidemic.

Primarily, my purpose is to lead our association with a heart and mindset of service, while helping others be leaders. The continued success of the KBA depends on our individual and collective engagement. Now, please indulge me as I contemplate the other two things through the lens of servitude. The desire to engage in public discourse, and perhaps even the freedom to do so, is at risk. Let us respect the messenger, even if we cannot agree with the message. Shun the negativity. As servant leaders, by action and example, we can listen and lift one another up. We can focus instead on pursuing and sharing joy.

The other task is daunting. The opioid crisis infiltrates not only our profession but also the very lives of our colleagues, families and communities. Describing it as an epidemic is an understatement. The wolf is at our door. We need not merely keep it at bay, but send it

skulking back to the woods. The damage is immeasurable to the addicts, their families, their employers, and our society. Once you have seen it, you cannot stop seeing it everywhere. There are lost souls - some hungry for a way out, some so lost they do not remember when their normal vocabulary did not include the desperate measures taken feeding a habit, rehab, jail, or homelessness. Losing everything becomes the vicious circle of their daily existence. What can or should we do? I will be asking that question and hopefully find those to help us with an answer in some measure.

With these things in mind, let me tell you a little about our upcoming year. We begin during the January Bar Leaders Conference with Doug Blaze and Buck Lewis sharing their message on creating a legacy. February promises a celebration of the full circle our membership represents with the Golden Gala honoring our 90 members who have been licensed 50 years or more. The 14<sup>th</sup> Law Practice Today Expo in April again hosts nationally renowned presenters. Your input was heard and the planners included a track specifically for transactional attorneys, another track for litigators, and more practical programming for your staff. Free Speech, Free Press and Free Society mark the theme for Law Day in May. Keel Hunt, author of *Crossing the Aisle, How Bipartisanship Brought Tennessee to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and Could Save America*, joins us as we reflect on the cornerstones of representative government. September brings the Supreme Court Dinner honoring the judiciary's service. The November Memorial Service to me is perhaps our most meaningful program.

Along the way, there will be exceptional CLE, social programming and publications by hardworking committees and sections. The Professionalism Committee will continue considering every single rule change proposed by the Tennessee Supreme Court, which listens to the KBA in particular because of our thoughtful input. But your organization is always open to questions or information. If you have a particular concern about programming, service, or our profession, tell the corresponding committee or section. Better yet, join them.

Congratulations and welcome to the newly elected Board members. We look forward to doing great things together in service to the association. My thanks to all the outgoing and remaining board members for sharing your time and talent. Thank you also to the committee and section chairs who readily took my call and accepted leadership. Thank you to the Barristers for your many good works as servant leaders. Especially, thank you Marsha Watson, and your staff, Tammy Sharpe, Tracy Chain, Lacey Dillon, Jonathan Guess and Shari Holt, for more things than I have space to write about them.

When the year comes full circle next December, like my predecessors, I hope to leave the KBA in at least as good a shape as today, and hopefully even a bit better. I am humbled and grateful to be the President of your association. Thank you for permitting me to serve.

*“What I think we always need to consider is how best to use the time that we've been given to serve. We won't be here forever.” – From Crossing the Aisle, by Keel Hunt.*

Excerpted from  
remarks at the KBA  
Annual Meeting on  
December 14, 2018.