Legal Aid of NorthWest Texas Announces Recipients of 16th Annual Women's Advocacy Awards

Legal Aid of NorthWest Texas (Legal Aid) has announced the recipients of its **16th Annual Women's Advocacy Awards** to be presented on July 12 in Dallas. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas will receive the Business Leadership Award; Rev. Larry James and CitySquare will receive the Nonprofit Leadership Award; Paul Zoltan will receive the Louise Raggio Women's Legal Advocate Award; and Randy Johnston will receive the Champion of Justice Award.

The Women's Advocacy Awards (WAA) supports civil legal aid for victims of domestic violence. Each year, the WAA recognizes exceptional advocacy on behalf of women living in poverty. This year's event will be held at 6 p.m., July 12, 2016, in Arlington Hall at Lee Park.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas (BCBSTX) has a long history of working to advance opportunities for women and children in Texas. BCBSTX has provided numerous grants through its "Healthy Kids, Healthy Families" initiative, partnering with nonprofits to offer sustainable programs to underserved communities and provides safe environments for growth. Notable among these are partnerships with the Caring for Children Foundation, which provides immunizations to uninsured children through its Care Van fleet, and the Texas Women's Empowerment Foundation, which provides urban gardens along with healthy cooking demonstrations and mentoring provided to residents in need, as well as "Kids Meals," a Meals-on-Wheels-style summer

program that helps feed young children who may not otherwise have regular meals outside the school year due to limited economic and transportation resources.

BCBSTX also created the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas STEM Scholarship, which provides $20,000 scholarships to underprivileged high school seniors seeking college study in a STEM-related field. In a related effort, BCBSTX's WISE group (Women Improving the Strength of the Enterprise) hosts Dallas Girl Scouts at its state-of-the-art facility, providing a full day of STEM-related activities for young girls. In addition, leadership within BCBSTX actively demonstrates its support through the encouragement of executives to hold Board seats with organizations including Texas CASA, REAL School Gardens, and It's Time Texas. The organization also promotes advancement of women from within and encourages female leadership to participate in programs such as the Leading Women's Executive program.

Larry James

Larry James has been involved in developing and implementing holistic, justice-focused approaches to congregational and community service and outreach throughout his career. Since 1994, James has provided executive leadership for CitySquare (formerly Central Dallas Ministries), a faith-based, human and community development corporation that battles poverty and its various related expressions in several inner city neighborhoods in Dallas and beyond. First serving as Executive Director and then President and CEO, James began his CEO role with a vision for CitySquare's future fund development and external community endeavors. CitySquare offers a variety of services to its clients: legal services, youth and children's ministry, affordable workforce housing, initiatives related to work force development and technology training, housing interventions for homeless persons, and spiritual development to neighbors living in the communities of East and South Dallas.

James, a native of Richardson, Texas, is married to Brenda Erwin. The couple, who reside in one of the neighborhoods CitySquare serves, have two grown daughters.

Paul Zoltan

Paul Zoltan is a long-time pro bono attorney volunteer specializing in immigration law. In 2014, inspired to do more when the influx of Central American women and children to Texas soared, Zoltan launched a pro se asylum workshop model that would multiply the representation provided to these refugees. In the last two years, more than 150 asylum applications for women and children have been completed at and submitted through these workshops. Through this project, Zoltan is credited with saving the lives of immigrant women and children who fled horrific and violent circumstances in their home countries.

Zoltan also mentors other attorneys, and works closely with the Catholic Charities team of AmeriCorps lawyers, whose caseloads number as high as 250 individuals and families. He helped the organization start its own legal program for immigrant children, training and mentoring staff in their representation of children in immigration court. He is a passionate advocate who fights against poor attorney practices in the field of immigration law, and is an inspiration not only to immigration lawyers, but also to those who practice in the area of public service law.

Randy Johnston

Randy Johnston has been a great supporter of women's causes and legal aid for the poor for many years. Johnston, whose law practice focuses on the professional and ethical practice of law, is known both as "the lawyer with a ponytail" and the attorney who will sue other lawyers for malpractice and client abandonment. A founding supporter of the Dallas Bar Association's Law Jam, a musical fundraising for the Dallas

Volunteer Attorney Program (DVAP), a joint program of the Dallas Bar Association and Legal Aid of NorthWest Texas. During Law Jam 2, Johnston auctioned off the right for the winning bidder to cut off his ponytail following the performance of his blues band, Blue Collar Crime. Two groups paid $7,000 each for the right to cut off his ponytail, and all of the proceeds went to DVAP. Randy was awarded a Presidential Citation by the Dallas Bar Association for his efforts to aid the poor.

He is a highly sought after speaker, presenting more than 100 speeches designed to educate other lawyers on how to avoid client problems while complying with the ethical rules and standards of professionalism. Johnston is proud to practice law with Robert Tobey, Chad Baruch, and his son, Coyt. He is married and the proud father of eight children, five of whom are strong, independent women.

Ramona's Story

Ramona's husband tried to kill her in front of a crowd of bystanders when he lifted her off of the ground by the throat. Before bystanders could intervene, Ramona was thrown onto the concrete sidewalk and she lost consciousness. A witness called police, but the abuser had fled the scene and his family and friends refused to cooperate with authorities or share the husband's location.

With her husband on the run, Ramona, the mother of two children, filed for divorce pro se. Unsure how to proceed on her own, she applied for help at Legal Aid of NorthWest Texas (Legal Aid). With the assistance of the Legal Aid attorney, Ramona amended the petition for divorce, and located and served her husband, who was in jail. Legal Aid assisted Ramona in finalizing the divorce, where she obtained sole managing conservatorship of her children, permanent injunctions against further abuse by or contact from her ex-husband, and no visitation of the children by their father.

The Women’s Advocacy Awards event helps provide critical civil legal aid for women like Ramona. This year’s WAA event takes place from 6-8 pm on Tuesday, July 12 in Arlington Hall at Lee Park in Dallas. Additional information is available on the 16th Annual Women’s Advocacy Awards Facebook event page, https://www.facebook.com/events/1572399809724590/permalink/1580695462228358, or by contacting Sam Prince at princes@lanwt.org.