

Embracing Gratitude and Service as your New LBA President

Following in the steps of Kate Crosby, Seth Gladstein and so many others are truly huge shoes to fill. Much has been accomplished by the Louisville Bar Association in recent years: the Bar created an Employee Assistance Program for our members, hired an amazing new executive director and Bar Center renovations are well underway.

I am grateful to follow in their footsteps. Having just experienced the holiday season, gratitude is top of mind. While my own career and life, like many in our profession, is marked by achievements and successes, it bears pause to reflect on how that came to be in my life. I am lucky to run a successful solo practice and could easily look back with a selfish lens thinking *I* studied hard, *I* took the risk to build my own practice, *I* got good at what *I* do and *I* deserve it. But that ignores the huge number of people and organizations that were the wind in my sails.

I am the product of parents who valued education, and the son of an OB/GYN who put himself through school and built his own medical practice. I am the child of a family who helped me afford higher education and who respected owning your own practice. The taxpayers of Kentucky subsidized much of my unusually inexpensive legal education. When I got out, I was lucky to meet my first boss at a wedding and make him laugh in the bar line. When I went in for an interview the following Monday, he simply said, "Here's your desk"; I had no interview.

I am grateful for the attention and friendship provided to me by every attorney at Darby & Gazak, where I first learned litigation skills and medical terminology. After leaving that firm for Connecticut and returning in the wake of the '08 crash, Mike O'Connell graciously hired me as a Juvenile Court Prosecutor. There, Chris Brown, Scooter Bell and Judge David Holton got me comfortable and competent with hearings and trials. After eventually opening my own shop, people like Richard Nash, Kevin Weis, Scott Zoppoth and many others referred me my first cases. Even today, most of my cases are referrals from other lawyers. David Gray covered my first years' dues in the Kentucky Justice Association. Other colleagues continue to answer their phones or meet me for lunch to workshop cases. I am eternally grateful for each of them and, frankly, never express it. I do so here.

Knowing that I had just branched out with my own practice, John Bilby, now with Stoll Keenon Ogden, called me with great advice. He told me he looked at the Louisville Bar Association Pictorial Roster and did not see my face. He suggested I join and be active in the LBA. He said it was the litmus test to determine who was essentially credible. I hung up the phone and joined that day.

I got to know nearly all of those lawyers through the Louisville Bar Association. The LBA provided a collegial environment where I could get to know opposing counsel and judges socially. Knowing other lawyers in this capacity earned me much needed benefit of the doubt, credibility and legitimacy. The LBA afforded an opportunity to network and expand my business. It built a group of experienced attorneys I could call with a variety of questions of practice. I started as a member of the Solo/Small Practice section of the LBA when Valerie Herbert ran the section. Ever since, I litigated several cases with her and her firm and am grateful to know her and others socially before such lawyers are reduced to "opposing counsel."

Thereafter, I ran the Solo/Small Practice section for a few years, earning Section of the Year, until Dean Furman graciously put me on the LBA Board. I remember so clearly at the Bench & Bar when he asked me to join. I was elated. The Bar means and gives so much to me, I am humbled and eager to serve the LBA.

I continue to offer advice to young lawyers or attorneys looking to go out on their own, knowing the fear and risks involved. My first piece of advice consistently is: "Join and be active in the Louisville Bar Association."

I look forward to this year serving with and for you as this year's President of the Louisville Bar Association.



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Bryan R. Armstrong
LBA President

INTRODUCING 2024 LBA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Maria Fernandez



Assuming the role of president-elect is Maria A. Fernandez, a partner at Fernandez & Moloney. Fernandez works with clients across the United States and abroad. Her practice is focused in several areas including estate planning, probate and administration, elder law and special needs planning, corporate, individual and international taxation, and corporate law, with an emphasis in closely held corporations.

She has served previously as a delegate from the Louisville Bar Association to the Board of Governors of the American Bar Association and also served as co-chair of the LBA's Diversity & Inclusion Committee. Fernandez serves on the Board of Directors of the Legal Aid Society and is also a Board Member and Treasurer of the Louisville Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. She received her J.D. from the University of Louisville Brandeis School of Law in 1989.

Sam Wardle



Moving up to vice-president/ treasurer is Samuel Wardle. He is a litigator at Frost Brown Todd who primarily focuses on complex insurance-coverage disputes between policyholders and insurers. His work in this area includes everything from "occurrence" disputes and Kentucky uninsured and underinsured motorist coverage exclusions to personal property valuation litigation and insurer liability for broker negligence.

Wardle received a degree in journalism from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and started his career as a reporter. He also taught English as a second language in China and worked as a wilderness instructor in Canada prior to enrolling and graduating, *summa cum laude*, from the University of Miami School of Law in 2013.

He is a past chair of the LBA's Litigation Section, for which he received the "Section of the Year" award. He also devotes a significant portion of his time to pro bono work and volunteerism.

Jennifer Kleier



Joining the Executive Committee as secretary is Jennifer Kleier, a partner at Karem & Kleier Law. She has worked in private practice since 2015 as a litigator and practices in the areas of family law, criminal law, guardianship and estate/probate. Prior to working in private practice, she served as a public defender for the Louisville Metro Public Defender's Office for five years.

Jennifer received her undergraduate degree from Murray State University and her Masters in Sports Administration from UofL before graduating from Brandeis School of Law in 2010. She is chair of both the LBA's Gender Equity and Health & Wellness Committees. She was recently honored as the WLA 2023 Member of the Year and previously honored by the LBA as chair of the Committee of the Year for the Gender Equity Committee. She is a graduate of the LBA's Leadership Academy and was honored to be an associate member of the Louis D. Brandeis Inn of Court from 2016-19. She currently serves as Chair of the Board for UP for Women and Children, a drop-in day shelter in Louisville serving unhoused women, children and marginalized genders.