



Meet the LBA's 2026 President

Sam Wardle

Photo by Jim Kransberger

Early Years

Tell me about your childhood – where did you grow up?

I grew up in Wilmore, Kentucky, the “holy city,” known for being the home of Asbury College and Seminary and having the most churches per capita in the state.

Do you have siblings?

I have three sisters, two older and one younger.

Did you have any childhood interests or hobbies?

My main lifelong hobbies have been reading and fishing, since early childhood. I took up fly fishing when I was 18 and have been doing it obsessively ever since. As a reader, I've always loved noir mysteries, and my favorite writers are Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett.

What was appealing to you about your school, and what was your college experience like?

I graduated from UNC-Chapel Hill's School of Journalism and Media. UNC is an amazing school academically, and I had some incredible teachers there. Louisville and Kentucky basketball fans may not appreciate it, but I loved the UNC/Duke basketball rivalry and the atmosphere of those games.

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Legal Beginnings

Did you always know you wanted to be a lawyer? If so, what brought you to that conclusion? If not, when and why did you decide to pursue a career in law?

Absolutely not. I wanted to be a writer, so I pursued a career in journalism. I only began encountering lawyers as a local newspaper reporter—it seemed like every city council, zoning board or nonprofit had at least a few attorneys hanging around. I became intrigued by the leadership role that lawyers played in all kinds of governmental agencies, nonprofits and businesses. Meanwhile, the newspaper industry was collapsing. So, it just seemed like a no-brainer to try out the law.

What was your law school experience like?

I went to law school at the University of Miami in Florida, and I had a phenomenal experience there. My professors were excellent and I made a ton of lasting friendships with classmates. I found the subject matter fascinating. And of course, it was fun studying in a place where the coldest “winter” days are in the mid-70s.

Career Today

Who would you consider to be some of your mentors in the Louisville legal community?

I didn’t attend college or law school in Louisville, and I moved back here with my wife in 2016 after working several years in Miami, Florida. Since then, I have been incredibly fortunate to have worked at two great Louisville firms, Middleton Reutlinger and Frost Brown Todd, with some of the best lawyers in the state. At Middleton, I learned a lot from working with Rebecca Jennings and Libby Gray, and at Frost Brown Todd, I have a huge list of mentors who’ve invested in me and my career: Steve Crawford, John Crockett, Chris Johnson, Chris Robinson, Chris Burnside, Kendrick Wells, Casey Hensely, Corey Skolnick, Tom O’Brien, Peter Cummins, Doug Langdon, Theresa Canaday and many others have all helped me grow and improve as a lawyer.

What do you think most people misunderstand about being an attorney?

Lawyers are often portrayed in the media as being unscrupulous and dishonest—I think of one of the opening scenes of the show “Suits,” where Harvey Specter bullies a client into accepting a settlement by lying about the terms of his firm’s engagement letter. This is probably how a lot of people think of lawyers behaving, but the huge majority of lawyers I’ve encountered are extremely careful to be honest and forthright.

Bar Association

Why did you decide to get involved in the LBA?

Initially, I got involved with the LBA because I didn’t go to law school here and wanted to get plugged in with the legal community. I’ve stayed involved because of the people I’ve met and because I’ve seen how important the LBA is to Louisville and to attorneys in Louisville.

What do you think are the top benefits of being an LBA member?

Hands down, it’s the community. There are a lot of great nonprofit organizations in town, but the LBA is the only one that regularly brings together attorneys from across the spectrum, from criminal defense, civil, corporate, in-house, judicial, government agencies and any other practice area you can imagine. The LBA is where lawyers can come and make lasting, meaningful relationships with attorneys they might otherwise never meet—or that they might only meet as adversaries.

What are some of your goals for your year as President of the LBA?

I’m fortunate that the LBA is already strong due to a series of excellent presidents including Maria Fernandez, Bryan Armstrong, Kate Crosby and Seth Gladstein, who have all worked tirelessly to move the LBA forward. We’ve also benefited in recent years from the hard work of an excellent and committed staff as well as a dynamic executive director in Kristen Miller. The pandemic created many new challenges for membership organizations like the LBA, and I’ve witnessed Kristen, the LBA staff and past leaders shepherd us through those and position the LBA to be even stronger than it was before. My primary goal is simply to keep us moving on the right track, providing meaningful and impactful support for our members and continuing to promote the LBA’s core mission of promoting justice in Jefferson County.

What are you most excited about as you begin your year as the LBA’s leader?

I’m most excited to just have the chance to keep engaging in and supporting the local legal community. That’s what the LBA is all about.

What do you think are the LBA’s greatest strengths?

What are our biggest challenges?

The LBA’s greatest strengths are its members and the dedicated staff who work day in, day out to support the members. Our biggest challenge in the year ahead is continuing to foster and develop the Louisville legal community in the era of remote work and Zoom meetings.

Personal Interests

Tell me more about your family.

I’m the least interesting person in my family. Before we had kids, my wife, Janna, was a pastry chef and worked at some of the best restaurants and hotel properties in the world, including the Four Seasons, Blackberry Farms and BLT Steak on South Beach. Now she’s an artist who makes intricate paintings and multimedia pieces. My son, Henry, is 12 years old and loves science fiction and weird facts. My daughter, Clara May, is a 9-year-old budding fashion designer and musician.

What do you like to do in your free time?

My lifelong passion is fly-fishing, but I don’t have as much time to do it as I’d like. These days, if I’m not fishing, I’m spending time with my kids, reading mysteries or playing guitar.

What community organizations do you support or volunteer with?

Why are they important to you?

In recent years, I’ve devoted a lot of time to pro bono representation of petitioners for asylum in the United States. Our immigration system is utterly broken, and one consequence of that is a completely dysfunctional asylum system that does not always recognize people who have a real, viable basis to claim asylum in the United States. My proudest moment in this field came in 2024, when a team of us at Frost Brown Todd won a precedent-setting Sixth Circuit appeal on behalf of our Honduran client. The resulting Sixth Circuit order was the first in the Sixth Circuit that recognized single mothers as a potentially protected class of people.

If you weren’t an attorney, what other career path do you think you might have pursued?

Journalism. I worked as a newspaper reporter for several years before going to law school, and I would still be doing that if it wasn’t for the unfortunate collapse of the local news industry. I loved the fast-paced, intense environment of working at a paper, and I loved the sense of doing something different every day, and of doing work that felt directly impactful.

What’s something not a lot of people know about you?

I was born in Mexico. My parents were Bible translators for Wycliffe, a missionary organization, and spent a number of years in Mexico working to translate the New Testament into an indigenous language. We moved back to Kentucky when I was a toddler.

What’s your favorite movie – and your favorite guilty pleasure movie?

Same answer for both – “The Big Lebowski.” It’s the only movie I never tire of re-watching.

Are you a music fan? If so, what’s your favorite performer or band?

I mostly listen to jazz, and my very unoriginal favorite musician is Miles Davis.

What is your favorite restaurant in Louisville?

Wherever my kids want to eat.

