

In retrospect: What a year!

As I wrap up my year as president of LTLA, it's hard to believe the unprecedented events that we've been through as an association, as individuals and as a state. I began my term as president in the midst of the turmoil wreaked upon our state by hurricanes Katrina and Rita. About half of our LTLA members lived and worked in the areas of Louisiana impacted by the storms. Many lost their homes, offices and even the courthouses in which they practiced. Recovery has been slow but we're getting there.

Even as Hurricane Katrina approached, there was no way anyone knew of the scope of the ensuing disaster. However, in the wake of that storm and Hurricane Rita that came only a few short weeks afterward, we quickly determined that our highest priority was to identify how LTLA could be of greatest help to the hundreds of members and their families who were displaced by the storms.

Initially, we established a list server to help members locate each other, find places to live and offices, receive news and just be in touch with others. We followed up with programs and efforts that ranged from working with the governor's office to extend filing deadlines for lawsuits to coordinating hurricane relief fundraising.

Fortunately, we were not alone. We experienced an outpouring of support from ATLA members and from state trial lawyer associations across the nation. Our colleagues in other states opened their offices and homes, offered to buy home and office supplies for hurricane-devastated attorneys and sent invitations to assist with legal matters. Many ATLA members joined LTLA to show their financial and moral support of the association and its members.

As we wrapped up 2005, we recognized that LTLA had to transition from

crisis mode back to the business of providing the first-class services that our members have grown to expect from their association. Now, one year after Katrina and Rita, we've bounced back with a host of outstanding CLE conferences—some focused on hurricane-related topics—and other programs that make LTLA such an important asset to the membership.

You may have noticed that quite a few of my columns in *Louisiana Advocates* over the past year focused on shedding light on the unscrupulous practices of the anti-trial lawyer industry that has been created in the United States by special interest groups. Behind these “astro-turf” organizations are big business players such as the insurance, oil, chemical and drug industries. Through these columns, I have sought to provide you with information that may be useful in understanding the challenges faced by those of us who support a strong and vibrant civil justice system.

These coordinated attacks on our civil justice system first surfaced about 20 years ago, intensified during the 1990s and continue today. As one astro-turf organization is unmasked for what it really is, two or three more are formed. There's no way in the world that we can even come close to matching the financial resources that big business has pumped into these smear campaigns. However, we can fight back, and one way to do so is through membership and active participation in organizations like LTLA and ATLA.

Without us, nothing would stand between the special interests and their goal of warping the civil justice system into an instrument that serves them, with little regard for the rights of individuals.

Recently, I've grown more optimistic that the special interests can be held in



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President's Column

check. They've lost significant power-grabbing battles at federal and state levels. The steamroller tactics they employed to win their way with Congress and state legislatures have been slowed. Trial lawyer organizations at federal and state levels have stepped up to fight back.

Serving as president of LTLA is among my highest professional achievements. It has been an honor to serve you. I am extremely grateful to our members and to our Board of Governors for all that you do to keep us strong. I also enjoyed working closely with our LTLA staff, whose dedication and competence is what keeps our association running on a day-to-day basis.

I congratulate Burton LeBlanc on becoming our next president. I know he will do an excellent job. He has my full support.

Thank you for honoring me with the privilege of serving as your 2005-2006 president.