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Executive Director's Perspective: It Takes a Village - By Melissa J. Schank

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The months of June and July are special times for TCDLA, though extremely busy. Most people are preparing for their summer vacations, but in the home office, June is particularly demanding, preparing for and orchestrating the annual Rusty Duncan Advanced Criminal Law Course, our annual board meetings, and all events that includes. But it's all worth it for the opportunity to work with and see so many of our wonderful members. This year we had more than 800 attendees. Our success was due to our members and the leadership of our course directors?Gerry Goldstein, Nicole DeBorde, John Hunter Smith, and Mark Thiessen?who selected 36 stellar speakers.

At the annual TCDLA Board meeting, all board members checked in and signed a conflict of interest statement, as well as a code of conduct policy and implementation of a procedures policy. TCDLA is one of the few associations proactive in creating a policy. The Executive Committee was very thorough in writing the language the board adopted in June. We are working on creating a training for board members and staff to review annually. This is so new that many associations will use TCDLA's as a model. The board also voted in the North Texas Criminal Defense Lawyers Association as a new affiliate?welcome! David Moore also created the TCDLA Family Task Force, headed by Cynthia Orr and Nicole DeBorde, to aid with border issues. Our members have shown an overwhelming response in providing support and assistance.

The June meetings are also unique because of the changing of the guard. I had the opportunity to work closely with David, getting to know him on a personal and professional level. I truly admire his persona and the leadership he's shown. He has guided me through challenging times, and I am grateful for his time and dedication. At the annual board meeting, we swore in our new board members, and I'm looking forward to getting to know them. In addition, we swore in a new president, Mark Snodgrass, my boss for the next 12 months. Each year, by the time I truly get to know the president and how to interact efficiently, it's time to change the guard again. But I've worked with Mark as CDLP chair and on other committees in the past, so we are off to a great start.

Once Rusty ended, it was immediately back to work. We returned to the home office and began immediately processing some 800 evaluation forms from Rusty attendees. We ensure that every comment is recorded and seriously considered so we can continue improving. When we finish, we will start planning and making preparations for Rusty Duncan 2019 with our new course directors: Bobby Mims, Casie Gotro, Doug Murphy, and Jani Maselli Wood. Mark your calendars for June 13-15, 2019. The Hyatt Regency room block was full this year, so you might want to go ahead and make your reservations for 2019. This will be a legislative year, and though we understand everyone has many options, we want TCDLA to be your go-to

for CLE. We strive to design CLE geared towards criminal defense attorneys, inviting exceptional speakers and experts while providing networking and time for socializing that cannot be matched in online CLE. We welcome any suggestions you may have for topics for future TCDLA CLE.

June is also particularly close to my heart as we get to celebrate Father's Day. This year I had a surprise visit from my dad. It was great just hanging out with family and, of course, eating lots of food. We had plenty of laughs and—as always—goodbyes were bittersweet. I owe my dad a lot for teaching me to adapt. As Air Force brats, we moved around when I was young. My knack for adapting to change and my learned social skills stem from these experiences. I almost wish I could have moved my kids around every other year just so they too could have gained similarly. It seems that talking on their game headsets will have to do for now for them learning communication skills. But I cherish the time I got to spend with family. One gratifying part of this visit came when dad saw the *Voice* cover with my photo on the coffee table. In that moment we could share in the pride I take in the place I work. I look forward to sharing and cherishing many more such moments with him. I have immense respect for the men who are fathers who raise children, nieces, nephews, and siblings, who are responsible for molding and mentoring the young. I genuinely believe in the saying "it takes a village to raise a child."

We can also apply that same saying to a company or association. I know TCDLA is not successful because of any single individual. Our accomplishments are a result of the vision and passion of our officers, board members, committees, and members. Our staff provides the necessary support needed to assist in reaching the association's goals. The president at the helm of TCDLA relies on past presidents and the executive committee's guidance. It is great leadership that supports and empowers those they are surrounded by—again, it's a village.

As swiftly as June came and went, July was here. Between the processing of all items related to Rusty Duncan, Public Defender training, and Capital CLE, we only had a little over a week to plan for July seminars. We prepared for our Trainer of Trainers to stay up to date with what our members want from our speakers. Experienced five-star speakers worked to convey what is expected of our future speakers. And we held the final edition of the Unleashing the Beast series, closing out Heather Barbieri's year as CDLP chair, as well as an orientation and a members trip hosted by the Snodgrasses. Together we learned anew how TCDLA, TCDLEI, and CDLP—all unique and complicated in their own right—work together in complementing one another.

In between the activity, business stopped for half a day on July 3rd for TCDLA's Declaration of Independence Readings. Robb Fickman and Chuck Lanehart helped organize more than 100 readings throughout the state. Word is getting out, and we had several out-of-state defense bars participate as well. This event will continue to grow due to their efforts.

What a rush—reading the Declaration on the steps of the Blackwell Thurman Courthouse. It was interesting to have so many people walk by and ask what we were doing. Many were enticed by the free doughnuts and coffee, but most left proudly displaying an American flag or lapel pin, and a number were curious enough to stay and listen to the reading. So many were brought together in this truly patriotic event hosted by the Austin Criminal Defense Lawyers Association and TCDLA. The audience included judges, attorneys, defendants, peace officers, children, and courthouse staff. We even had one comment that he would have participated if he didn't have to go to jail. It was truly inspirational to witness such a gathering of folks from different walks of life. Each criminal defense lawyer or TCDLA staff person read a portion of the declaration with a true sense of patriotic pride, and despite the archaic words, each reader finished composed—and I believe with a true sense of connection to the never-ending battle against injustice that so many of our members face.

In these turbulent times, what can you do to serve your county and truly help society, fight for equality and justice under the law? What can you do to help ensure everyone has equal opportunity? Are you willing to

stand up for what you believe even if you are in the minority? How do you help others understand your point of view without creating strife? How do we teach our society to be proud of who you are and what you believe? Did our forefathers face these same issues confronting us today?

I strongly believe in order for our society to be successful we must learn to love thy brother and neighbor, uplift and encourage each other, stand by and support those in need, and respect our individual independence. Our country came together and fought for independence and the right for everyone to pursue happiness.

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