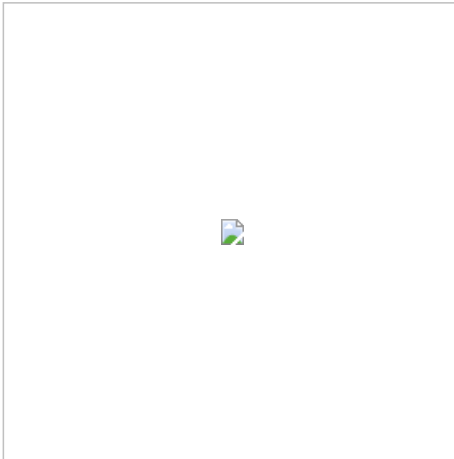


## Minnesota bar gets high marks for its relief efforts

By: Mark Cohen    March 13, 2006    0



Marta-Ann Schnabel

It is difficult to gauge the full extent of the gratitude that the Louisiana bar feels for its colleagues in Minnesota without actually going down there to experience it.

In a recent interview in New Orleans with *Minnesota Lawyer*, Louisiana State Bar Association President-Elect Marta-Ann Schnabel did not even try to contain her enthusiasm when talking about the contributions of Minnesota attorneys.

Of all the generous donations from state bars, "I think Minnesota gave us the most of any state," Schnabel says. "And it wasn't just the money. Minnesota has gone out of its way. It is the only bar association that has contacted us to send representatives here to see and experience the extent of the devastation."

So far, the Minnesota State Bar Association (MSBA) has raised \$420,000 to support relief efforts for lawyers and other hurricane victims.

"We were totally amazed when we were contacted," Schnabel recalls. "We were unaware that these efforts were going on. By the time [the MSBA] contacted us, most of the money had been raised. ... And again it isn't just the money. It is the fact that people outside of our immediate area have come to understand how desperate we are and are supportive of our efforts to rebuild. Frequently, we do not get that message from folks who are not in Louisiana. So it was absolutely the biggest morale booster that we as a bar association had experienced."

Among the legal organization recipients of MSBA funds were:

- the state bar foundations in Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama (which received funds to aid displaced lawyers);

- three legal services offices: Southeast Louisiana Legal Service Corporation, Mississippi Center for Legal Services

- three legal services offices — Southeast Louisiana Legal Service Corporation, Mississippi Center for Legal Services Corporation and Legal Services Alabama; and
- the Pro Bono Project, in New Orleans.

The MSBA collected and shipped truckloads of office furnishings for small-firm lawyers and others. In addition, some funds went to Second Harvest of Greater New Orleans.

An MSBA contingent, led by the group's president, Susan Holden, met with the heads of legal services organizations across the Gulf Coast to educate themselves on the problems these organizations face in serving the legal needs of lower-income people affected by hurricane Katrina. Accompanying Holden were the co-chairs of the MSBA's Katrina Task Force Delivery of Legal Services Subcommittee, Abigail Turner and Jim Baillie.

The MSBA contingent toured the devastated areas and met with bar leaders, including Schnabel.

"Susan Holden is, of course, just amazing. As I understand it, she went door-to-door for us," Schnabel observes.

When the MSBA group was in Louisiana, "we spent a great deal of time with them so that they could see what was going on at the pro bono project and at Southeast Louisiana Legal Services," Schnabel says. "And I also spent probably four or five hours with them touring the devastated areas of the city so that they could see firsthand how their efforts would go to help. It is hard to understand the vastness of the damage and the problems without a tour."

How you can help

The MSBA has funds set up for humanitarian relief, law office relief and legal-assistance relief. You can donate online at <http://www.mnbar.org/katrina/index.htm> or by check to: Minnesota State Bar Foundation, Attn: Katrina Relief, 600 Nicollet Mall #380, Minneapolis, MN 55402.

For lawyers interested in donating something other than money, the Louisiana bar is looking for volunteers to come down and assist hurricane victims with their legal needs.

The Louisiana State Bar Association recently persuaded the state Supreme Court to allow lawyers from outside Louisiana to handle civil pro bono cases, Schnabel notes. "If there is a Minnesota lawyer interested, we have an opportunity for that. In association with our Legal Aid group, a lawyer from out of state can come in and handle civil cases for a week in landlord/tenant matters, divorce matters and the like. We have training set up. We have had law firms send someone down for a month at a time."

So far, the reciprocity only applies to civil cases — not criminal matters. Criminal matters tend to take longer and are therefore not as conducive to having out-of-state lawyers handle them for short periods of time, Schnabel

explains.

The easiest way for lawyers to volunteer is through the hurricane-relief effort coordinated by the American Bar Association, according to Schnabel. You can visit [www.abanet.org/katrina](http://www.abanet.org/katrina) for information about opportunities to join the ABA's relief efforts.

Schnabel would also appreciate it if lawyers could contact their congressional delegations and let them know the rebuilding of New Orleans (and other hurricane-ravaged areas) is a priority.

The Louisiana State Bar Association is in the process of drafting a model letter that people will be able to send to members of Congress to let lawmakers know the importance of rebuilding.

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