

The Best & Brightest

BY ROBERT F. SMITH

Jump on board— we're off and running!

Be part of something special and share in the excitement and enthusiasm exuded by our officers, Executive Committee and committee chairs as we depart on this year's journey with the "The Best & Brightest." That's right, as the theme implies, the goal of the Family Law Section is to seek and find those hidden diamonds in the rough that may lie amongst us, to utilize their talents and to get people across the state actively involved in the section.

Many of you who don't practice family law or represent clients in divorce cases are still familiar with the Family Law Section through our annual CLE seminar, *Divorce on the Beach*. This year will be our 21st seminar, which is set for May 31st through June 2nd at the Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort (download a registration form at the section's Web site www.alafamlaw.org). This year we are pulling out all the stops in preparation for our theme, "The Best & Brightest," and calling upon our best and brightest members and judges to assist. We call our

seminar your "one-stop" CLE destination because *DOB* offers all 12 hours of continuing legal education, including one hour of mandatory ethics. Plus, this year, in cooperation with the Administrative Office of Courts, we are providing the opportunity for attendees to receive their required two hours of re-certification as guardians *ad litem* while attending *DOB*.

Each year at *DOB* we sponsor a **silent auction** whose proceeds benefit children's charities throughout the state and fund scholarships for each of our in-state law schools. Through the generosity of those in attendance and contributors statewide, we have raised funds that have benefited such charities as Big Oak Ranch, Catholic Children's Charities, National Children's Advocacy Center, Children First, and many others.

This year proceeds from our silent auction will benefit Children First, The National Children's Advocacy Center and Storybook Farm.

Children First began in the mid-1990s by a group of advocates and legislators who wanted to improve the lives of children in



Left to right are Jim Jefferies, Carole Medley, Robert Smith, Wanda Devereaux, Wendy Brooks Crew, Robin Burrell, Noah Funderburg, and Jerry Baxley.



Alabama. Children First is a comprehensive program designed to deal with a multitude of children's issues including dropouts, teen smoking, substance abuse, juvenile crime, violence, delinquency, and other programs targeted to help place children first. The Children First Trust Fund is now set up to receive funds from the "tobacco settlement" in addition to private contributions. Our own Wendy Brooks Crew is chair of the board of Children First.

Located in the rich pastures of Opelika, Storybook Farm, Inc. offers spiritual nourishment and emotional healing to children with disabilities or life-threatening diseases or those who have suffered a loss. Storybook Farm provides Hope on Horseback for their riders through a

unique program of therapeutic horseback riding and creative activity.

The National Children's Advocacy Center (NCAC) is a non-profit organization that provides training, prevention, intervention and treatment services to fight child abuse and neglect. Since being established in 1985, the NCAC has trained more than 54,000 professionals from the United States and 20 countries.

Not only are we planning *Divorce on the Beach XXI* but we are hitting the road with section-sponsored CLE seminars which we call "road shows." "The Best & Brightest" road shows have made stops in the Shoals Area and Montgomery. We traveled to Huntsville on Friday, March 30th for another road show at the National

Children's Advocacy Center. Huntsville attorneys Amy Slayden (past chair) and Amy Creech (membership committee chair) are preparing for what will be another fun and rewarding road show.

Our section is making history by taking the "The Best & Brightest" to sea. That's right, we planned our first-ever cruise! We departed from Port Canaveral, Florida April 13th with stops in Nassau, Bahamas and the island of Coco Cay. Section members and their guests enjoyed the comforts and adventures of a world-class cruise together with a unique opportunity to expand their knowledge of family law while at sea. Our plans are to make this an annual event.

Many months of preparation have been dedicated to the theme of bringing together "The Best & Brightest." Thanks to Sammye Oden Kok of Birmingham (chair-elect) for her unselfish dedication during this transition. Sam has spent countless hours working side by side with me and others to plan "The Best & Brightest." Sam's husband, Tony Kok, has designed this year's logo, the brilliant sun shown "strutting its stuff." Also, thanks go to Wendy Brooks Crew of Birmingham (past chair) for agreeing to join us again as an officer. Wendy is our treasurer and already has our financial affairs in order. She is developing a new accounting system to meet our growing needs. Others



who have made the transition a success are Noah Funderburg, Michael Hasty, Robin Goode, Rita McClain, Robby Lusk, Charles Dunn, and many others.

This year we pulled out all the stops and called upon our section's true gems to join our journey. Making an encore appearance are Wendy Brooks Crew, Judy Crittenden, Sam Rumore (past chair), Gordon Bailey (past chair), Robin Burrell (past chair), Rick Fernambucq (past chair), Noah Funderburg (past chair), Judge Brian Huff (past chair), Robby Lusk, Dick Bell, Wanda Devereaux, Jerry Baxley, and others.

We welcome back Jim Jefferies (Mobile) as secretary. Jim is an active leader in the section, having served on our Executive Committee and as treasurer. Also, Julie Palmer (Birmingham) is returning to the Executive Committee as past chair. Julie did an excellent job

directing *Divorce on the Beach* for many years. This year Candi Brannen Peeples (Birmingham) is our new director. She has many new and exciting ideas for *Divorce on the Beach XXI*.

Wanda Devereaux (Montgomery) is returning to our Executive Committee. Wanda is a true jewel. She is one of the most courageous people you will ever know. Wanda has agreed to lead us and our efforts in Montgomery and with the legislature. At her side will be her husband, Jerry Baxley. Jerry is our liaison with FAMLAA. FAMLAA (Family Law Association of Alabama) is a new and exciting organization formed by many outstanding members of our section to lobby and inform the legislature of the pros and cons of pending legislation which impacts those of us who practice divorce/family law. FAMLAA has already made a tremendous impact in Montgomery thanks to the efforts of Jerry (executive director), Wanda (president), Kathy Coxwell, Monroeville (legislative committee chair) and many others. FAMLAA is separate and independent from the Family Law Section.

Wanda planned and executed our second road show in December in Montgomery. Our entire Executive

Committee contributed, along with Robin Burrell, Birmingham (past chair), and Bill Kelley, Montgomery (general counsel, Retirement Systems of Alabama). Attorneys from throughout the Montgomery area and lower Alabama attended the Montgomery road show. Everyone enjoyed the section-sponsored reception at Nobles that followed.

Joining our board as new at-large members are David P. Broome (Mobile), Carole Medley (Florence) and Charles Dunn (Birmingham).

David Broome is a welcome addition to our board. He is vice president of the American Academy of Adoption Lawyers.

Carole Medley (Florence) was co-chair of the "Shoals Area Road Show" which took place in October. This was our first road show for "The Best & Brightest." I was honored that our entire board was there to present this CLE in my hometown. They were joined by Judy Crittenden (Birmingham) who graduated high school in Florence and Robby Lusk, assistant general counsel for the ASB. The section took this opportunity to present a "Lifetime Achievement Award" to Charles E. Carmichael, Jr. of Tuscumbia. To the delight of those in attendance, Tom Heflin (Tuscumbia) entertained the

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Wanda Devereaux, a member of the section's Executive Committee and president of FAMLAA, with section President Robert Smith



Wendy Brooks Crew, chair of Children First and section treasurer, with Robin Burrell, past chair of the section

conference with antidotes from Mr. Carmichael's colorful law career.

We are fortunate to have Judy Crittenden serving as our ABA Liaison. Judy has distinguished herself nationally. Her talents and contacts will be invaluable to our section.

Robby Lusk is serving as our professional responsibility advisor. He has always given his time and energies for our section whenever asked.

Charles Dunn (Birmingham) is serving as editor of our newsletter. He is off to a great start. This fall, he published our first expanded newsletter, *The Best & Brightest*. Charles has devoted many hours of his time to this project. He brings new ideas and concepts for content, design and distribution. Our goal is to have an expanded quarterly newsletter that is easy to read and has contributions from section members statewide.

This year, Noah Funderburg (Tuscaloosa) has agreed to serve as our past chair advisor. Noah and his wife, Mary, have been the true backbone of the section for many years. Noah's many contributions to the section include our listserve, Web site and newsletter. We appreciate Noah and Mary's continued involvement, support and advice.

Judge Brian Huff (Birmingham) is our judicial advisor. As past chair of the section,

Judge Huff was instrumental in involving our judges in section activities. He is committed to helping our section grow and benefit from interaction with our judiciary.

Dick Bell (Birmingham) is serving as our ASB liaison. We are honored to have such a distinguished member of our section coordinating our efforts with the ASB.

Sam Rumore served as our section's past chair and later served as president of the Alabama State Bar. We all know of his contributions to the ASB and his interest in preserving history. Sam has agreed to serve as our historian and chair our Archives and History Committee. This year, we are making a concerted effort to preserve our section's history.

There are many others who are a part of this year's team. You will be learning of their involvement and contributions through the section's newsletters.

In March, our members will receive our first e-newsletter. Many hours have been devoted to creating a monthly publication of the section which can be delivered by e-mail. This will allow the section to communicate on a more frequent basis at a fraction of the cost.

Now, with the leadership in place, we are off and running! I am honored to be a part of such a talented and dedicated group of professionals. I challenge you to join us on our journey with "The Best &

Robert F. Smith

Robert F. Smith of Florence serves as the 2006-07 chair of the ASB Family Law Section, after having been the section's vice chair, treasurer and at-large board member. He is a graduate of the University of North Alabama and Cumberland School of Law, Samford University. Smith has served as the youngest member of the Florence City Council, as well as on the Alabama Housing Finance Authority's Board of Directors and as an Assistant Attorney General. He is also trained as a domestic violence mediator.

Brightest" and become an active member of the Family Law Section. ■

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