



### From the Corner: Connected Communication



Our Office thrives on our ability to communicate with one another and work together. We might expect that the widespread availability of cell phones would improve our ability to connect with other team members, but researchers at the University of Essex have demonstrated that our phones can actually hurt our relationships. Studies show that the omnipresent cell phones vying for our attention detract from interpersonal relationships by making people seem less invested in a conversation.

In the studies, pairs of strangers were asked to discuss a topic for ten minutes. Some pairs conversed with a cell phone on the desk near them; others conversed with no cell phone present. The pairs who conversed in the vicinity of a cell phone reported that their relationship quality was worse. The pairs also reported feeling less trust and thought that their partners showed less empathy if there was a cell phone present. In other words, even a non-functioning phone is a distraction to those who are around it.

According to the study, interacting in a neutral environment, without a cell phone, seems to help foster closeness, connectedness, interpersonal trust, and perceptions of empathy — the building-blocks of relationships.

If simply putting a cell phone away can improve the quality of our communication, consider the difference a phone call can make over sending an email, or opting for an in-person visit rather than an instant message. Taking time to consider the best way to communicate can help us advance our relationships, build stronger teams, and help us to be of service to all. — Vince

### Law Library garners national Advocate Award

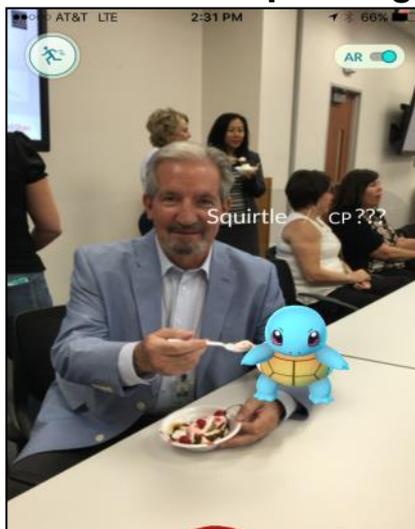


Harris County Attorney Vince Ryan received the prestigious Law Library Advocate Award from the Government Law Libraries Section of the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) at its annual conference in Chicago in July. The award recognizes efforts to promote, support, and improve the Harris County Law Library. The Harris County Law Library has become a nationally recognized library with improved access to legal information for lawyers and Harris County residents. Pictured from left: Mariann Sears, Vince Ryan, Joe Lawson, Kelly Browne (2015-2016 Chair of the AALL Government Law Libraries Section), and Holly Gale (Chair of the AALL GLL Awards Committee).

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### CAO hosts special guest for ice cream



Special Assistant Terry O'Rourke sidled up to a Squirtle Pokemon on July 15 at an Ice Cream Social hosted by our Office. Terry was generous enough to share his ice cream with the little guy before catching him. The event was held in celebration of National Ice Cream Day. See more pictures from the Ice Cream Social on Page 3.

### HVLP Law Library offices open



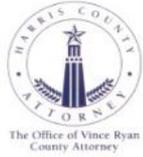
The Houston Volunteer Lawyers pro se assistance program began staffing the offices on the lower level of Congress Plaza on July 15. The program, previously located in a booth in the basement of the Family Law Center, is now closer to the Harris County Law Library where many pro se litigants are referred. Last year the HVL booth helped over 6,300 individuals. The additional space next to the Conference Center allows room for volunteers from the Houston College of Law and major law firms. Andrews & Kurth LLP will be providing attorneys on Fridays for the next three months with other firms expected to follow for similar three-month commitments.

### 5 things YOU didn't KNOW about ME



Michelle Hebert is a Paralegal in the Public Law Practice Group

1. I am of French Canadian "Cajun" descent.
2. I love to cook. My specialties are chicken & sausage gumbo and crawfish etouffee.
3. I worked in the retail and advertising/PR business before going to paralegal school.
4. I love to travel. My latest trips have been to Italy and Scotland.
5. My favorite place to relax and unwind is my parents' beach house in Crystal Beach, Texas.



WE, THE MEMBERS OF THE HARRIS COUNTY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE, BOTH LAWYERS AND NON-LAWYERS, ADHERE TO THE HIGHEST STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL ETHICS AS WE SERVE THE PEOPLE OF HARRIS COUNTY AND STRIVE TO BE THE BEST PUBLIC LAW FIRM IN THE UNITED STATES.



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BACK TO SCHOOL SUPPLY DRIVE



Drop your donated supplies into the bins located near the elevators on each of our floors in Congress Plaza by **August 12**.

**“Advice is what we ask for when we already know the answer but wish we didn’t.”**

**— Erica Jong**

### Three new ACAs sworn into office



Vince Ryan administers the oath of office to Cynthia Montemayor and Jim Ezer.

Cecilia Montalvo, Jim Ezer, and Cynthia Montemayor have been appointed Assistant County Attorneys by Vince Ryan.

**Jim Ezer** was formerly employed by Schirmeister, Diaz-Arrastia, Brem LLP, serving as National Counsel for E. I. du Pont de Nemours and handling benzene litigation. He was also the Chief of the Criminal Division for the United States Attorney's Office and a chief prosecutor in the Harris County District Attorney's Office. Jim earned his law degree from South Texas College of Law. He will be working in the Litigation Practice Group.

**Cynthia Montemayor** has been assigned to the Protective Services Group. She has worked as a prosecutor for the state's Special Prosecutions Unit handling civil commitments for sexual predators. She comes to us from Sheehy, Ware, & Pappas. Cynthia holds a law degree from South Texas College of Law.

**Cecilia Montalvo** will be working in the Hospital District Practice Group. She is a graduate of Baylor University and South Texas College of Law. She has experience in business and contract law having advised international businesses on regulatory and operational issues. Cecilia interned for Texas Supreme Court Justice David Medina.



Cecilia Montalvo

### TDCAA appoints CPS committee

Assistant County Attorneys Tiffany Reedy and Lynn Chamberlin have been appointed to serve on a TDCAA Ad Hoc Committee to explore ways District and County Attorneys can better represent the Department of Family and Protective Services in cases involving abused and neglected children. Thirteen others from across the state have also been appointed to the committee with the first meeting to be scheduled before the end of the month.

### Ex-detective's termination upheld

A civil service panel unanimously backed the Sheriff's firing of former Sgt. Craig Clopton who admitted that he had sex with a witness in the Deputy Darren Goforth murder. Mr. Clopton claimed he was not on duty at the time of the incident. Assistant County Attorney Nick Turner argued at the hearing that Clopton was on duty when he had sex with the witness. He said Clopton went to the witness' home around 9 a.m. that day, despite the fact that his timecard stated he started his shift an hour before that. Turner also argued that Clopton's misconduct could compromise pending murder cases that the former detective worked on.



Nick Turner

### Repeat election contestant sanctioned



Laura Hedge

A state district judge signed an order on July 25 awarding \$52,350 in expenses, costs, and attorneys fees against a plaintiff who had filed two separate election contests against the Harris County Clerk's Office. At the hearing on the County's motion to dismiss the plaintiff stormed out of the courtroom and accused the judge of treason.

Demetria Smith first filed suit in November 2015 claiming that the County Clerk had tampered with election results in the Houston mayoral race because Channel 13 allegedly reported results different from those on the Clerk's website. That case ended with the judge finding there was no evidence of election or voting fraud and dismissed the case after a two-day hearing.

In March 2016, Smith filed a second lawsuit again claiming election fraud in her race for Texas House of Representative District 149. The judge ordered that Ms. Smith cannot file any further affirmative pleadings in the case until she pays our sanctions. The case is *Smith v. Harris County Democrat Party, et. al.* The Order granting sanctions is available [here](#). Assistant County Attorneys Laura Hedge and Douglas Ray led the trial team.

### Ray attends 2016 Conference of the County

Public Law Practice Group Manager Douglas Ray attended the County Investment Academy presented by the Texas Association of Counties June 20 to 22 in Galveston. The conference featured investment officers, economists, and other experts discussing the influences on the economy and trends in investing. Attendees heard about cyber safety, the current economy, and market status. Doug provides legal advice to the Budget Office and others concerning bond and financial matters.



Douglas Ray

# ICE CREAM

# *Social*



Barbara Hernandez, Mariann Sears,  
Grover Berotte, and Barbara Staszyc



Kimberly Beltran, Barbara Hernandez, and Cara Protein



Kelsey Binns and Paul Morris



April Poole Baker



Vince Ryan



Barbara Armstrong, Melissa Spinks, and Nick Lykos