

Neil Bogan Professionalism Award



Mark Blongewicz

Neil Bogan was one of my law partners long ago and so I take special pride in announcing that one of my current law partners, Mark Blongewicz, is a recipient of the Neil E. Bogan Professionalism Award for outstanding contributions to the legal profession. This Award honors a Tulsa County lawyer who is known for his conduct, honesty, integrity and courtesy and who best represents the highest standards within the legal profession. These high ethical standards are met every single day by long-standing Hall Estill lawyer, Mark Blongewicz.

Mark was nominated for this Award by another member of the Bar, Ryan Childress. Mr. Childress submitted a nomination that stated as follows:

Recently, a lawyer went out of his way to help me and I believe his selfless act of service deserves praise and recognition. This lawyer's name is Mark Blongewicz of Hall Estill law firm.

I recently left my previous employer and was looking to join with a different firm. The problem is there was an ethical conflict as the new firm had a case against my old firm where I represented the previous defendant. I contacted Hall Estill asking for the in-house ethics counsel and was eventually placed on the phone with Mr. Blongewicz.

I offered to compensate Mr. Blongewicz for his time; he refused, passionately. He then took 15 minutes out of his day (a 0.3 billable moment) to help me decipher the Oklahoma ethics code and answer all the questions I had. Near the conclusion of our conversation, I again asked Mr. Blongewicz if I could compensate him for his time. He refused. As if he had not done enough for me by helping a complete stranger, he then left me with something even more valuable: hope. I am paraphrasing, but his remarks rang something to this effect: "Ryan, it saddens me to hear that you are returning to the side of evil [Plaintiff's personal injury litigation]. However, I hope one day three years from now you look back and realize this was just a minor bump in the road, nothing more."

As a lawyer who has only been practicing for six years, I have come across all types. I have previously sought assistance from more seasoned attorneys who informed me they were "too busy" (legally translated meaning "too important") to help a younger,

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struggling lawyer. Mr. Blongewicz's behavior is the antithesis of that approach. I pray one day I am able to take time out of my day to help a younger lawyer as he has done for me. I also pray that one day his behavior becomes the standard instead of the exception.

Several of Mark's law partners commented on his nomination for this Award. Mike Cooke, the Hall Estill Managing Partner, stated:

Mark is one of the most thoughtful, careful lawyers I have dealt with in 40 years of practice. I have frequently sought his advice in connection with litigation and litigation prevention. Mark has mentored and tutored many young lawyers helping them learn to analyze and write and how to behave in a firm, thoughtful and gentlemanly way. When I asked Mark to take over as the Hall Estill Ethics Counsel, I was confident that he would be thorough and practical. I also knew he would be strong in dealing with lawyers wanting to bend him one way or the other. There is no pretense about Mark; he is purely professional.

Jon Epstein, who recently succeeded Mark as the Firm's Ethics Counsel, added these words:

Perhaps the greatest compliment one lawyer can give to another is when he asks that lawyer for advice. I lost track of how many times I have called Mark to ask for his counsel on ethics questions, litigation strategies and even personal matters. Without fail, Mark has taken the time to talk through each issue and help me address it. Mark has been a sounding board, confidant and mentor for hundreds of our colleagues. He has a calming influence who can always be counted on to do the right thing. That is why he is the "go-to" partner when advice is needed. He also has an endearing ability to work through complex issues with a perfect blend of professionalism, kindness and humor. Last year I was asked to follow Mark as the Firm's Ethics Counsel. Rather than just let me navigate new issues on my own, Mark has generously given me his time and support. Whenever I encounter an issue

about which I am unsure, I call him. Each time, he provides as much guidance as I need. I am honored to have Mark as a partner, colleague and friend. Our profession would benefit if we all strive to be as professional, generous and kind as Mark has been for his 40 years in the practice of law.

Hall Estill partner Tony Jorgenson commended Mark and observed that:

I can't think of a more deserving recipient of an award for professionalism than Mark. In the 20 years I have spent working with him, he has exemplified professionalism for countless attorneys within and outside Hall Estill. He is always on time, always prepared and always accessible. Clients, colleagues and opposing counsel alike can count on a response to an email, or a return telephone call, in minutes, not days. He promotes respect for the legal system and the pursuit of justice for his clients. Mark has the poise, honesty, and reasoned good judgment that embodies a heightened sense of responsibility and fair play, as well as respect for others, even when zealously advocating on behalf of the client. You will never hear him raise his voice, shout someone down, or play loose with the facts or the law. Instead, he is thoughtful, deferential, and reserved. But when he speaks, everyone listens. His door is always open for those seeking his ethical counsel. He devoted himself to the training and mentoring of young attorneys, like me. Throughout my career, I have leaned on Mark more times than I can count for advice and he has always responded with patience and wise counsel. Mark is a consummate professional and I have been honored to practice with him and call him my friend.

Mark received his undergraduate degree from the University of Nebraska (B.S. in Education in 1977, with Distinction). He is a long time Cornhusker fan and supporter. He graduated from Duke University School of Law and was awarded his J.D. in 1980. His entire career has been spent with the Hall Estill law firm. At the firm, Mark has been very active serving on the Board of Directors, the Compensation Committee, the Executive

Committee, as well as serving as the second baseman for the softball team for many years. Additionally, he served as the Hall Estill Ethics Counsel for many years, providing counsel to the Firm's lawyers on ethics questions, conflicts issues, and professionalism. Mark focuses his practice in the litigation arena with an emphasis on tort and insurance defense. He has an AV rating through Martindale-Hubbell. In addition, he has been selected as a Best Lawyer in America in both commercial litigation and insurance law, named a local litigation star by Benchmark Litigation and named an Oklahoma Super Lawyer in civil litigation defense. He is a member of the Chancellors Club of Distinguished Alumni of the University of Nebraska and a Fellow of the Oklahoma Bar Foundation. Mark is married to Lynn Conard, has one daughter Traci and Granddaughter Tessa and is the proud "father" to his dog Ginger. Mark enjoys golf matches with his partners and friends and reading novels. He is a history buff as well as a parrot-head Jimmy Buffet fan.

All of us at Hall Estill are proud of Mark Blongewicz and we celebrate his receipt of this deserved Award. He sets a very high standard that we strive to achieve. Congratulations Mark!

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Lawyer Referral & Information Service

TCBA's Lawyer Referral and Information Service (LRIS) provides a much needed service to the community and is a source of clients for participating TCBA member attorneys. Work continues to evaluate the performance of the service and find ways to improve it, not only for potential clients, but for the participating attorneys. We strive to offer a service that manages the balance between service to community and the need for paying clients as best possible. For attorneys just starting a practice, the experience of meeting with clients is often a priority.

The clients we receive on-line, over the phone or at the front door are often referred to us from the courthouse. They typically don't know exactly what kind of help they need but it is clear they need help. For those we meet in person or talk to on the phone, more than half are referred to a pro bono legal service, a social services agency or some other agency. For attorneys whose practice is well established, service to the community might be a priority.

Working with the LRIS Committee, we've recently identified a potential improvement to TCBA's LRIS service and are in the process of making changes. We've averaged over 60 referrals per month over the last year. Too often though, clients are matched with an attorney whose practice area is not best fit for the client's legal matter. The committee's assessment revealed that the areas of law, or panels, included in our system were not specific enough in some cases. In other cases, panels were grouped in a way that was not intuitive to the client. In the end, the wrong panel is selected. By September 1st, we will have added 27 new panels, moved 7 and eliminated 7. To all of our current participating attorneys, thank you for your service. Thanks especially to our LRIS Committee members and chair, Cathy Hoopert. Contact Greg Gordon at the Bar Center if you have any questions or would like information to participate in the LRIS service.

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