

President's Column: *Room to Grow*

By Graham Carner



I am excited to begin the new CABA fiscal year, and appreciate the trust placed in me as President. We have already had a great start to the year at the June membership meeting, where we heard from Kelly Sessoms, who was on the verge of assuming the role of President of the Mississippi Bar. He detailed his hopes and plans for the upcoming Bar year, including a continued emphasis on growing and maintaining local bar associations throughout the state.

CABA is the largest local bar association in Mississippi, but we have room to grow. That is why a major focus of my presidency will be on growing membership. Post-COVID, membership associations across many fields have experienced significant declines in membership. This has been the case for CABA, which saw membership decreases even before the pandemic. CABA's peak membership over the past 10 years was in 2017 when we had just over 1,000 members. Our post-COVID low dipped below 600. Last year, we had 631 members. I have set a goal for 700 members this year. Simply put, membership associations like CABA need members to succeed and fulfill their purposes.

For attorneys to re-engage with CABA

(or engage for the first time), membership must have value. The good news is that CABA membership already offers fantastic value. Many of our membership meetings offer CLE credit in addition to a wonderful meal. The lunches, Fall Social (October 1), and Holiday Social (December 8) offer outstanding opportunities for connections and networking. The lawyers you meet at CABA may not practice the same area of law as you. The right connection could lead to your next case or transaction or a piece of advice to handle a tricky situation. CABA also offers opportunities to serve the community, with pro bono events and programs to educate the public about the justice system and rule of law.

While CABA has great value, it is up to us to share that with others. The best membership recruitment tool for a membership association is the recommendation of a peer. That is why I will be spending the coming weeks making direct connections with former members who have not yet renewed as well as to lawyers who have never been a part of CABA. I encourage you to do the same. Speak to the lawyers in your firm, office space, or that you see in court about the value of CABA. Welcome them to join us as we seek to grow and expand our outreach.

Renewing or joining CABA is simple through our website (<https://caba.ms/join>) or by reaching out by email to capitalareabarassociation@gmail.com.

I look forward to seeing and serving each of you in the coming year. ➡

Inside

2

Longtime Southern District Judge Tom Lee Celebrated

3

A Brief Light in Holly Springs:

Shaw University and the Earliest Legal Education for Black Mississippians

5

The Law is the Point:

A Conversation with Judge Kristi H. Johnson

7

Legal Families of Mississippi—The Abdallas

8

CABA's 2026 Awards

Professionalism Award & Outstanding Community Service Award

9

There's a Hole in My Head Where Algebra Used to Be

Upcoming Events



October 1

CABA Fall Social

Check website for updates on this event

The views expressed in the articles published are solely those of the authors and do not represent the views of CABA, its officers, directors, or staff.



October 20th • Click for more info

Longtime Southern District Judge TOM LEE CELEBRATED

By Elizabeth Howell Pritchard

Wisdom. Courtesy. Integrity.

On July 21, 2026, the United States District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi held a celebration honoring District Judge Tom S. Lee. Attorneys, fellow judges, former law clerks, family, and friends filled the courtroom (and an adjacent overflow courtroom), eager to pay tribute. Chief District Judge Sul Ozerden presided over the ceremony.

Various speakers shared personal stories about Judge Lee—recounting his college and law-school days, his early legal career, and his time on the federal bench. Through each speaker the message was largely the same. Judge Lee, throughout his personal and professional life, has modeled wisdom, courtesy, and integrity.



To begin, Myrtis Franke shared Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith's tribute to Judge Lee, which the Senator had read into the Congressional Record on the floor of the United States Senate that morning. Next Sid Salter entertained the packed courtroom with tales of Scott County, where Judge Lee started his legal career, serving as a county prosecutor, youth-court judge, and municipal judge. District Judge Dan Jordan, who succeeded Judge Lee in 2006 when he took senior status, aptly described Judge Lee as one of "the finest judges that our state has ever seen." He shared how he admired Judge Lee as a practicing lawyer and now strives to emulate Judge Lee on the bench.

Assistant United States Attorney Jennifer Case, on behalf of the Federal Bar Association, complimented Judge Lee's steady temperament, dedication to the rule of law, and steadfast respect for the courtroom and the people inside it. As a token of appreciation, she presented a puzzle fashioned from Lee's judicial portrait—a nod to his ability to work through the complex civil and criminal cases brought before him.

Lawrence Coco, a former law clerk to Judge Lee and current Head of School at Jackson Prep, shared the special role Judge Lee, his wife Norma Ruth, and their family have played in his life. He described Judge Lee as a leader, mentor, and teacher who treats everyone—his staff, the lawyers in his courtroom, and their clients—with compassion, respect, and kindness. Trey Jones, another former law clerk and practicing attorney, then delivered a video message topped off with a rousing rendition of "On the Road Again," accompanied by Trey's bandmates from Luckenbach, his Willie Nelson Tribute Band.

Judge Lee closed the ceremony by expressing his deep appreciation for the kind remarks. He introduced Norma Ruth, their children, and grandchildren, all of whom were in attendance. He recognized his former staff, including court reporters, law clerks, secretaries, and

courtroom deputies. And he shared what a distinct pleasure it had been to serve alongside his fellow judges and Clerks of Court. Judge Lee ended by saying, "God has richly blessed me. Serving as a United States District Judge has been a supreme joy and the honor of my life."

Personally, I was honored to attend, as I have Judge Lee to thank for my rewarding career as a federal law clerk. Judge Lee offered me a job in 2001, after I had completed only one semester of law school. When I reported for duty in September 2003 with three-month-old twins in tow, he didn't bat an eye. While I planned to stay for just one year, he kept me around for three and recommended me to his successor Judge Jordan. Since then, he and Norma Ruth have been a steady caring presence in my life, and I am fortunate to count them as friends. 📌

Elizabeth Howell Pritchard is Career Law Clerk to Judge Daniel P. Jordan III.

READ
MORE!
www.caba.ms



A Brief Light in Holly Springs: *Shaw University and the Earliest Legal Education for Black Mississippians*

By Gail S. Stephenson

In northern Mississippi, midway between Oxford and Memphis, lies the little town of Holly Springs. Today the town has fewer than 7,000 residents, but in the mid-1800s, Holly Springs was a bustling town with 40 lawyers.¹

In 1878, Holly Springs gained the distinction of being one of only two places in the South where Black citizens could obtain a legal education when Shaw University (renamed Rust University in 1882)² established a legal department.³ The nascent law school survived a yellow fever epidemic in 1878 that killed 4,100 Mississippians,⁴ but after two years the program ceased to exist. The likely reason for its demise was Mississippi's system that did not require formal legal training for admission to the state bar.⁵

The only other source of legal education for Blacks in the South was Straight University in New Orleans,⁶ but Straight taught civil law, which was useful only in Louisiana. Thus, southern Blacks who wanted an education in the common law were limited to Shaw.

Shaw University was founded in Holly Springs by the Freedman's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1866, one

year after the Civil War ended. The school was officially chartered as Shaw University in 1870. It was named after Reverend S.O. Shaw, who donated \$10,000 to the school.⁷

The school originally offered elementary subjects to both children and adults in Asbury United Methodist Church. In 1867 school supporters erected the first school building. It gradually added high school and college-level courses. The elementary school continued until 1930; the high school lasted until 1953.⁸

1878 was a momentous year for the school and for Holly Springs. The first two students from Shaw's college department graduated that year.⁹ Shaw then expanded its offerings to include a law department. Although most law schools at the time had only two-year programs, and the Whites-only University of Mississippi offered a law degree in one year,¹⁰ Shaw offered an LL.B. program modeled after Harvard University, which required three years of study for a law degree.¹¹ Shaw reported to the Commissioner of Education in 1878 that the department had one instructor, and six students were enrolled.¹²

But in July 1878, a yellow fever epidemic struck Mississippi. The epidemic raged through November 1878.¹³ The Commission reported

that "prevalence of the yellow fever in the Mississippi Valley and its continuance into the autumn prevented the opening of schools at the usual time and affected not only the larger cities but many of the small interior towns."¹⁴

The epidemic hit Holly Springs especially hard. Kinloch Falconer, the Mississippi Secretary of State, was a lawyer from Holly Springs. He left the state capital and went home to care for his brother and law partner Howard Falconer, and his father, Thomas Falconer, who were stricken with the fever. On September 17, 1878, he wrote the following, which was published in *The Clarion*, the Jackson newspaper:

Since my arrival here, two weeks ago tomorrow, one hundred of the citizens of Holly Springs have died... There are at least one hundred and fifty now sick... The fever has done its worst here... [N]urses and physicians are the only persons seen upon our streets.¹⁵

Falconer was able to bury his kinsmen before he too was overcome by the fever. He died on September 23 at the age of 39.¹⁶

Somehow Shaw continued its classes during the epidemic. The last report of the

1. David M. Callejo-Pérez, *Holly Springs: Introduction to a North Mississippi City*, in COUNTERPOINTS, SOUTHERN HOSPITALITY: IDENTITY, SCHOOLS, AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN MISSISSIPPI, 1964-1972, 20-21 (2001).
2. Shaw renamed itself to avoid confusion with another school named Shaw University in North Carolina. The new name was chosen to honor the secretary of the Freedman's Aid Society, Richard S. Rust of Cincinnati, Ohio. JAY S. STOWELL, *METHODIST ADVENTURES IN NEGRO EDUCATION* 123-25 (1922).
3. The U.S. Commissioner of Education issued annual reports on the status of education. Under the heading "Statistics of institutions for the instruction of the

colored race for 1878, SCHOOLS OF LAW" the Commissioner lists Shaw, Straight, and Howard University. COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION REPORT FOR 1878, XXXI (1880) [hereinafter COMMISSIONER 1878]. Howard established a law department in 1869, but not everyone considers Washington, D.C., part of the South.

4. DEANNE STEPHENS NUWER, *PLAGUE AMONG THE MAGNOLIAS: THE 1878 YELLOW FEVER EPIDEMIC IN MISSISSIPPI* ix, 126, (2015).
5. Irvin C. Mollison, *Negro Lawyers in Mississippi*, 15 J. NEGRO HIST. 38, 49 (1930).
6. COMMISSIONER 1878, *supra* note 3, at XXXI.
7. Rust College, *Our History*, <https://rustcollege.edu/history/> (last visited Nov. 7, 2025).
8. *Id.*

9. *Id.*
10. The University of Mississippi reported to the Commission in 1880 that in 1842 it had reduced its law program to one year. COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION REPORT FOR 1880, 182 (1882) [hereinafter COMMISSIONER 1880].
11. See A.Z. REED, *TRAINING FOR THE PUBLIC PROFESSION OF THE LAW* 177 (1921); COMMISSIONER 1878, *supra* note 2, at 57.
12. COMMISSIONER 1878, *supra* note 2, at XXXI.
13. NUWER, *supra* note 4, at ix, 126.
14. COMMISSIONER 1878, *supra* note 2, at XXXV.
15. Letter from Gen. Falconer, *Clarion* (Jackson, Miss.) Sept. 18, 1878.
16. NUWER, *supra* note 12, at 59.

Continued on page 4...

law department at Shaw was in 1880. Shaw reported to the Commissioner that it “gives the same advantages to women as to men,” and it still had a three-year law program with six students.¹⁷ However, it also reported that the law department was “[n]ot fully organized.”¹⁸

Irvin C. Mollison, the first Black appointed to the federal bench in the United States, opined that Shaw’s law department closed because in the 1870s it was easy for a Black man in Mississippi to become a member of the bar without a law degree.¹⁹ He explained that from 1840 to 1880, Mississippi had a decentralized system of bar admission. A “local judge in open court examined the candidate for admission on matters as to his technical training in the law, his educational qualifications, and moral character.” If the candidate satisfied the judge, the judge could admit him to all courts in the state. During Reconstruction, the Provisional Military Governor appointed a judge in each district who was “friendly to the Negro or at

least... not so hostile to him that they would not admit him to the bar.” The judge then appointed “three friendly lawyers” to examine the applicant.²⁰

Because of the dearth of opportunity for formal legal training in the South, Blacks who wanted to obtain a legal education studied law under White lawyers. Mollison’s father, Willis Mollison, a pioneering Black lawyer in Mississippi, reported that these White lawyers were “very generous,” enabling Blacks “to get their training under some of the most able and talented lawyers in the State.” They allowed Blacks to study in their offices and use their libraries. This all changed, around the turn of the 20th century, especially after a White Supremist governor, James Vardaman, came to power in 1904.²¹

When Shaw reported again to the Commissioner in 1882, the law program was gone. In the Professional Education section of the report, Shaw reported only a theological

department. The only legal education department for the State of Mississippi was at the University of Mississippi, which had returned to a two-year legal program.²²

The closing of Shaw’s law department in 1880 marked not just the end of a program, but the disappearance of Black legal education in Mississippi for more than 80 years. Blacks were not offered the opportunity to study law in Mississippi again until Cleve McDowell walked into the University of Mississippi Law School in 1963.²³ ➡

Gail S. Stephenson is the Louisiana Outside Counsel A.A. Lenoir Endowed Professor and the Director of Legal Analysis & Writing at Southern University Law Center. She is a graduate of Louisiana State University’s Paul M. Hebert Law Center, where she was a member of Order of the Coif and the Louisiana Law Review.

17. COMMISSIONER 1880, *supra* note 9, at 182.

18. *Id.* at 705.

19. Mollison, 15 J. NEGRO HIST. at 49.

20. *Id.* at 43-44.

21. *Id.* at 49-51.

22. COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION REPORT FOR 1882-’83, 143 (1884).

23. See Gail S. Stephenson, *The Unsung Heroes of the*

Desegregation of American Law Schools, 51 J.L. & EDUC. 118, 181 (2022).

CABA Membership Meeting August 18th



Lunch featured Judicial Panel: Court of Appeals Judge John Weddle, Court of Appeals Judge Amy St. Pe’, Supreme Court Justice David Sullivan; Moderated by: Court of Appeals Judge David McCarty

To view more photos of this CABA Membership Meeting, please visit caba.ms.

EVENT RECAP

The Law is the Point:

A Conversation with Judge Kristi H. Johnson

By Deborah Challenger



I recently had the chance to sit down with Judge Kristi H. Johnson of the United States District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi to talk about her first six years on the federal

bench, including how she got there and what she has learned along the way.

Judge Johnson first became interested in serving as a judge while working only a few steps from the bench. As a law clerk to U.S. District Judge Sharion Aycock and later to Judge Leslie H. Southwick of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, she saw both the demands of judging and the meaningful impact a careful judge can have on the lives of the people who come before the court. The experience impressed upon her the importance of judges who care deeply about the law and are committed to applying it faithfully.

The road from those clerkships to the United States District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi was not the product of a rigid plan. Judge Johnson describes the path as largely organic. She had heard that a lawyer is more likely to be struck by lightning than to become a federal judge, and she understood that timing and circumstance would have to align. Still, she made intentional career choices—particularly her decisions to seek a second federal clerkship and practice in federal court—that would prepare her if the opportunity ever came. As she put it, she did not follow a strict roadmap, but she made deliberate choices to be ready if lightning struck.

Perhaps surprisingly, the biggest obstacle in Judge Johnson's path to becoming a judge was not a lack of qualifications. It was self-doubt. She is the first woman to serve as an Article III judge in the Southern District of

Mississippi. Although it would have been easy, Judge Johnson says, to question whether she really belonged on the federal bench, she focused instead on her experience and the perspective she could bring. She also reminded herself that there isn't one path to the bench, and the judiciary is stronger when it reflects a range of backgrounds and experiences. In the end, Judge Johnson refused to let self-doubt hold her back.

Then lightning struck in November 2019, when the offices of Senators Roger Wicker and Cindy Hyde-Smith called to ask whether she was interested in interviewing for a federal judgeship. Judge Johnson met with both senators the day before Thanksgiving. A few weeks later, they submitted her name to the White House for Judge Keith Starrett's vacancy. She then interviewed with a group of lawyers from the White House and the Department of Justice's Office of Legal Policy and soon learned that she was the presumptive nominee, subject to an FBI background investigation. The investigation concluded in early February 2020, and the President announced her nomination the next month.

The timing made the rest of the confirmation process anything but ordinary. The COVID-19 pandemic halted travel and changed Senate operations. After months of waiting, Judge Johnson received notice in early September that her Senate Judiciary Committee hearing would take place the next week by Zoom. She appeared on a panel with five other nominees and later answered written questions for the record. Then the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and the nomination of Justice Amy Coney Barrett reshaped the Senate's calendar. A COVID outbreak caused additional delays. Judge Johnson's panel was finally voted out of committee in late October, and the full Senate confirmed her nomination on November 17, 2020. She officially became a federal judge when the President signed her commission

on December 1. She was sworn in and began work the next day.

While the nomination process unfolded, Judge Johnson was also serving as Mississippi's first Solicitor General. She had interviewed for that role with Attorney General Lynn Fitch during the same period in which she interviewed at the White House. She began as Solicitor General in March 2020—the month pandemic lockdowns began and her federal nomination was announced—and remained in the position until she received her judicial commission in December.

Her transition to the bench also produced a practical problem: the robe. Judge Johnson ordered one online as soon as the Senate confirmed her, but delivery lagged while court dates approached. She ordered a second robe with expedited shipping. The second arrived in time, and the duplication proved useful. She now keeps one robe in her Jackson chambers and another in Hattiesburg, where she often conducts criminal hearings.

Robe logistics sorted, the harder work of judging remained. No single prior job, Judge Johnson says, fully prepared her for the bench; each contributed something different. Her district court clerkship gave her a view of how a good judge manages a courtroom, handles sometimes difficult counsel, makes evidentiary rulings in real time, and gives careful attention even to routine orders. At the Fifth Circuit, she watched district court rulings tested on appeal—an experience that made her a more careful writer and still influences the way she drafts every opinion.

Private practice, meanwhile, gave Judge Johnson a continuing appreciation for the pressures lawyers bring into court: demanding clients, discovery disputes, limited budgets, and competing obligations. Her years as an Assistant U.S. Attorney broadened her federal litigation experience. Civil matters exposed her to discovery, experts, summary judgment, and trial. Criminal matters taught her the gravity

Continued on page 6...

of a federal courtroom, where liberty may be at stake and deadlines are unforgiving. Her service as Solicitor General taught her how a record is made, why cases fall apart on review, and what separates a defensible ruling from one that gets reversed. That experience translates directly to how she now builds a record and crafts opinions with one eye on the Fifth Circuit.

For Judge Johnson, those experiences share a common theme. A law clerk serves the court. A private lawyer serves the client. An Assistant U.S. Attorney serves the United States. A Solicitor General serves the State. A district judge serves the Constitution. “You are never the point,” she said. “The law is the point.”

That philosophy is tested most heavily in criminal sentencings, which Judge Johnson has found more difficult than she expected. Recommending a sentence as an advocate, she has learned, is very different from imposing one. A sentencing decision affects not only the defendant, the victim, and the community, but also families on both sides of the courtroom. The hardest part of judging more generally is knowing that every ruling can affect someone’s life, liberty, or livelihood—and that judges carry much of that weight alone. Supportive colleagues and court staff, she said, make the difficult days easier.

And despite the difficult days, Judge Johnson loves her job. The most enjoyable part, she says, is the sheer variety of cases and legal issues that she encounters. No two days are alike, and she particularly enjoys the energy of the courtroom during jury trials.

That enthusiasm for the courtroom shapes the advice that Judge Johnson gives to lawyers who rarely find themselves in one. For lawyers who do not practice regularly in federal court, she emphasizes that federal litigation is often motion practice rather than trial. Many cases

settle or are decided on written submissions, which means a brief may be counsel’s only opportunity to advocate directly to the judge. Lawyers should put their best arguments in writing rather than assume they will receive a second chance at oral argument. In court, her guidance is clear: be prepared, honest, concise, and respectful. Candor is essential. A judge can work with a lawyer who is mistaken; carelessness with the facts or the record is another matter.

Judge Johnson also encourages lawyers to speak with one another before filing a motion. A brief telephone call can resolve evidentiary objections, narrow a motion in limine, or eliminate a dispute that would otherwise require hours of drafting and briefing. And she cautions against throwing every conceivable argument into a brief and hoping one sticks. “More isn’t better in federal court,” she says. “It’s just more.” Counsel should identify the strongest claims or defenses, sharpen them, and trust them.

Judge Johnson’s own courtroom practices reflect what she appreciated as an advocate. She values consistent enforcement of the Federal Rules and Local Rules because predictability promotes fairness. She also tries to ensure that lawyers have room to make their case and leave the courtroom feeling heard, even when they do not prevail. One thing she avoids is tardiness. A self-described Navy brat, Judge Johnson considers punctuality part of her DNA. She starts court on time—and sometimes early. If she is ever late, she jokes, someone should send the U.S. Marshals because something has gone terribly wrong.

Judge Johnson’s judicial philosophy is straightforward: follow the law as written. She looks to statutory text and controlling precedent and applies the law even when she dislikes the result. She agrees with Justice Antonin Scalia, who famously said that a

“judge who always likes the results he reaches is a bad judge.” Her role, she says, is to apply the law to the facts rather than create the law. To that end, she welcomes a properly grounded motion to reconsider. A lawyer will not hurt her feelings—or make her angry—by asking her to take another look if they believe she got it wrong. She is equally committed to issuing timely decisions. She believes that litigants deserve prompt rulings, and delay rarely improves a case.

That same discipline extends to how she builds her chambers. Judge Johnson has three term law clerks, generally serving one-year terms. Academic performance, writing samples, and recommendations help determine whom she interviews, but the interview itself is intentionally relaxed. By that point she already knows the candidate can do the work. She wants to know whether the person will be a dependable teammate during a demanding year and whether the candidate will fit well with chambers and court staff. She considers her clerks part of her family and remains in contact with them after their service ends.

Life in chambers includes another regular presence: Judge Johnson’s rescue dog Ella, who accompanies her to work most days. That fact has some influence on what lies beneath the robe. Judge Johnson ordinarily wears business attire because she never knows who she might run into when she walks Ella outside chambers. “The robe covers a lot,” she observed, “but it doesn’t help much out in the parking lot.”

What comes through most clearly after talking with Judge Johnson is that the job still feels a little surreal for her. Nearly six years in, she has not lost the sense that lightning struck. She talks about the bench less like a job she earned and more like an honor she does not take for granted—a chance to serve her country as a federal judge. ➡

SOCIAL MEDIA

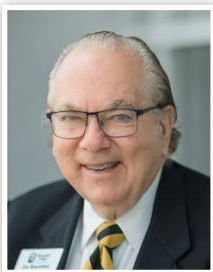
Follow Us on Facebook & X!



Statistics show that 90% of organizations now maintain social media profiles, and CABA is among that majority. You can find the Capital Area Bar Association’s page on Facebook and find us on X (@CABALaw). Social media is a simple way to improve communications within our organization, but we need our members to help to build an effective social media presence. If you are currently on Facebook or Twitter, please engage. Whether you like us, follow us, or comment on posts, you are helping build CABA’s social media profile.

LEGAL FAMILIES OF MISSISSIPPI

By Jim Rosenblatt



This is the second of a series of articles on legal families of Mississippi. The [first article](#) was on the Lee family with roots in Scott County, Mississippi. This article features the Abdalla family. If you would like to nominate a legal family with at least five attorneys for a future article, please email rosenbla@mc.edu.

Jerry Abdalla

As the patriarch of the Abdalla family, Jerry grew up in McComb, Mississippi, before earning his bachelor's degree in accounting and law degree from the University of Mississippi, followed by an LLM in taxation from NYU. He began his legal career at Carlton Fields in Orlando, Florida, providing business and tax counsel. There, he connected with Joe Bancroft, who had relocated his window and door manufacturing company from New York to McComb. After convincing Jerry to join Croft Metals, Jerry served as general counsel from 1978 until 1996 and assumed leadership of the company following Mr. Bancroft's passing. Beyond his corporate career, Jerry played an instrumental role in leading the Joseph C. Bancroft Charitable and Educational Fund, which supports the Croft Institute for International Studies at the University of Mississippi and the Batson Children's Hospital. In 2004, he was inducted into the University of Mississippi Alumni Hall of Fame. Jerry is now retired and resides in McComb with his wife, Jennifer.

Jake Abdalla

The older brother of Jerry, Jake is a native of McComb and an alumnus of the University of Mississippi (bachelor's and law degrees) and was commissioned through ROTC. After completing law school, Jake served four years on active duty as a JAGC officer with a tour in Vietnam. He continued his service for 21 years in the Army Reserves and retired as a Lieutenant Colonel. While on active duty, Jake earned an LLM from George Washington University Law School with a concentration in tax. Following his active Army service, Jake worked at a bank and then worked for Delta Title while establishing his private real estate practice in Slidell, Louisiana. After 37 years of private practice, he is now semi-retired.

Jerry Abdalla, Jr.

A graduate of McComb High School, Jerry earned his undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Mississippi. He began his legal career with a regional law firm in Jackson before serving as an Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Mississippi. Today, Jerry maintains a civil litigation practice representing governmental entities, businesses, and consumers, including representing the State of Mississippi against private prison contractors in the MDOC bribery scandal, acute care hospitals in opioid

litigation, and a landowner in the largest gasoline spill in Alabama history. Jerry resides in Jackson with his wife, Mary Clift.

Tom Abdalla

A native of McComb, Mississippi, Tom earned his bachelor's degree from the University of Mississippi before moving to Jackson to obtain his law degree from the Mississippi College School of Law. Afterwards, he joined his father, Jerry, at Croft, LLC, focusing heavily on manufacturing operations. Following Jerry's retirement, Tom stepped into the role of managing day-to-day operations at Croft. Tom resides in Brookhaven with his wife, Lindsey.

Mary Clift Abdalla

Raised in West Point, Mississippi, Mary Clift earned both her bachelor's and law degrees from the University of Mississippi. Following law school, she moved to Little Rock, Arkansas, where her practice focused on nursing home litigation. After marrying Jerry, Mary Clift relocated to Jackson and joined Forman Watkins & Krutz, LLP. As a partner, she defends complex civil cases for numerous Fortune 500 companies. Highly active in her community, Mary Clift chairs the Friends of Children's Hospital, serves on the Ole Miss Law Alumni Board, and previously chaired Party for Prep, where her daughter attends school. She and Jerry reside in Jackson.

Continued on page 8...

Lindsey Boyd Abdalla

Growing up in McComb, Lindsey earned her undergraduate degree from the University of Mississippi and her law degree from the Mississippi College School of Law. After practicing family law in Summit and Jackson, she married Tom and established

the Lindsey B. Abdalla Law Firm, PLLC in downtown Brookhaven. Today, she maintains a statewide practice handling domestic relations, divorce, adoption, and child custody matters. She currently serves as the President of the Lincoln County Bar Association and resides in Brookhaven with her husband, Tom. 🏡

Jim Rosenblatt is the Dean Emeritus and Professor of Law at Mississippi Christian University School of Law (MC Law) following 30 years of service as an Army Judge Advocate retiring with the rank of Colonel. He is a regular contributor to the CABA newsletter.

CABA'S 2026 AWARD WINNERS



Professionalism Award

Capital Area Bar Association (CABA) was pleased to announce Earl Marcus Wiggs, III ("Mark") received the CABA 2026 Professionalism Award. On May 12, 2026, during CABA's Evening Honoring the Judiciary event, the award was bestowed posthumously and Mark's wife, Rebecca Wiggs, accepted the award on his behalf.

Mark was an active member of CABA until the time of his death earlier this year. His nomination letter emphasized how well he met the award criteria: "Mark's consistent adherence to professional standards of practice, ethics, integrity, civility and courtesy embodied all that we seek to be as attorneys."



Outstanding Community Service Award

Capital Area Bar Association (CABA) was pleased to announce Margaret Oertling Cupples received the CABA 2026 Outstanding Community Service Award. The award was presented on May 12, 2026, during CABA's Evening Honoring the Judiciary event. As documented in her nomination: "Margaret exemplifies the very best of the legal profession through her exceptional service, leadership, and longstanding commitment to the Jackson community."

There's a Hole in My Head

Where Algebra Used to Be

By Terryl Massey

Most of us over 50 (that's as far as I'm going on age) are not as quick as we used to be. We really just want to know if we are on the down escalator to Geezerville, or whether something more ominous is lurking. I did some research.

Alzheimer's Disease — a diagnosis as fearful as it is final, and one that no one wants to hear. When was the last time you forgot a name and decided you had Alzheimer's? Right after you saw the movie, "Still Alice?" When you started telling a story, and, in the middle

of the tale, you forgot the plot? Scared that lost keys, lost phone, or a word you've used thousands of times before suddenly escaping you has a dark meaning? Just in case the stock market isn't enough to worry about, there's always that cognition thing to keep us awake at night.

For me, it's always been difficult to complete a medical history, since I come from a family of heavy drinkers. When all of your family members have livers that fully depreciate around age 60, who knows what conditions might have developed had the organ warranty not expired so soon? While I'm fairly confident

that no one had early-onset Alzheimer's, what other conditions have wandered through the genetic jungle of my heritage?

I've worried enough to do some research on dementia. The first thing I learned was that there are actually at least four types of dementia, of which Alzheimer's Disease is only one, although the most common. Vascular Dementia is next, followed by Lewy Body Dementia and Frontal Temporal Dementia. And there are others. Different diseases, different progression, different systems. So the bad news is that you can escape Alzheimer's, but still have dementia.

Okay, quick rundown.

CABA Membership Meeting

June 16th



Lunch featuring Mississippi Bar President Kelly Sessoms

To view more photos of this CABA Membership Meeting, please visit caba.ms.

EVENT RECAP

Continued on page 10...

Alzheimer's.

Alzheimer's is a slowly progressing dementia. The initial observed symptoms to make the diagnosis are loss of near-term memory and a decline in the ability to perform at least one daily activity. The damage is caused by the accumulation of amyloid and tau proteins in the brain, resulting in plaques and tangles. One theory is that these abnormal structures are toxic and kill other brain neurons. Currently, medical science cannot identify the cause or the cure for this protein flotsam.

Vascular Cognitive Impairment.

The second-most common form of dementia, it is caused by damage to the brain resulting from previous strokes. It's pretty easy to identify the cause after an MRI, and, while past damage cannot be corrected, future damage may be prevented. Typical symptoms include memory loss, confusion, and problems with reasoning, and it is often confused with Alzheimer's.

Dementia with Lewy Bodies.

This is a less common form of dementia than the first two, and, like Alzheimer's, results from the accumulation of protein deposits, called Lewy Bodies. Dementia caused by Parkinson's Disease is also part of this category. Patients can have similar symptoms as with Alzheimer's, but can also suffer (or not) from hallucinations. They may also develop the movement symptoms associated with Parkinson's, and they may develop sleep disorders. This is the disease that drove Robin Williams to suicide.

Frontotemporal Dementia (FTD).

Also the result of protein deposits—this time, the culprit is the tau protein. The real difference between FTD and Alzheimer's is the location of the damage. FTD starts in the frontal, or temporal lobes, of the brain, or both, while Alzheimer's damage lies deeper. Initial symptoms depend on the location of the damage. It can take the form of language or behavioral impairment, but memory often remains intact for a time. Language difficulty, also called aphasia, was the initial symptom for Bruce Willis.

These are the main forms of dementia, but there are others, including Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE), which often affects athletes in contact sports, and dementia from the improper use of alcohol or drugs, or resulting from a side effect of prescription medicine. Oftentimes, two or more of these forms can coexist in the same patient.

So, there's more to worry about than whether we remember the name of our second cousin's fourth husband. Speech patterns, math skills, balance, social appropriateness, housekeeping—a change in any of these could indicate a problem.

Fortunately, some experts have laid out what is part of the normal age-related decline vs. what is, basically, the on-ramp to dementia.

Normal Aging.

- Word retrieval is slower, but, although it may take longer to find the model name of your first car, it comes to you eventually.
- Learning is slower. That's why we ask our grandchildren to fix our cellphones.
- It's harder to multitask. If you pick up a dirty glass on the way to get your purse, your keys are going to end up in the sink. Inconvenient, but somewhat logical.
- Forgetting what has just occurred. You got up to get a beer out of the refrigerator during halftime, but it's halfway through the third quarter, and you're still standing in the refrigerator door, wondering. The idea is only temporarily gone; it comes back as soon as you see the empty cold mug on the counter.
- Slower reaction time. Fast conversations or tasks can be confusing. In other words, stop talking to Yankees and retire your jai alai scoop.

With these concepts in mind, let's look at:

Not Normal Aging.

You see someone you know on the street, but you go through the entire conversation without remembering his name. It comes to you as you're getting ready for bed. Completely normal. If the name is lost forever, there may be a problem. If you can't remember you ever even met him, jot that down for the next doctor's

appointment. If you can't tell him *your* name, run, don't walk, to the nearest neurologist.

Keep in mind, though, that memory loss is only one symptom. It doesn't qualify as dementia, generally, unless there is also a loss in at least one daily function. If you can still balance your checkbook (for those of us who still do), you're probably okay, but if you can't dress yourself—problem.

You can't locate your keys. If they're ultimately found on the kitchen counter (or in the sink), dresser, or your pocket, normal. If they're in the freezer, okay, just a little weird. (Tell your family that they lack storage imagination.) If they're in the toilet, add it to the list.

You just erupted and chewed somebody out. If it's your neighbor who "borrowed" your lawn mower without permission again, not ideal, but normal. If it's your mother-in-law, hmmm, sticky, but probably not dementia. A policeman? You've got some anger management issues, but you're probably looking at a night in jail, not a lifetime of cognitive deficits. If it's your bishop, yeah, put it on the list.

You think there's an elephant under your bed. Seriously? You'd better be knee walking drunk (which is how you saw him in the first place), and he'd better be pink.

You've turned seventy and decided to stop wearing a bra. Judging by the ladies on my street, perfectly normal. If you stop wearing any underwear, no problem, just keep it to yourself, please. If you stop wearing anything, better get that looked at (no pun intended).

So, we can't stop this awful thing, although early treatment helps. After all, we can neither cure nor prevent dementia. But worry? If it's coming to us, worrying will not help. "Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life span?" Matthew, 6:27 (New American Bible, St. Jerome edition). Or, as St. Matthew went on to teach, "Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will worry about itself. Sufficient for a day is its own evil." Matthew 6:34.

Bottom line? Go back to worrying about the stock market. ➡

WHAT—ME WORRY?



CABA'S 2026 ESSAY CONTEST

Each year the Capital Area Bar Association hosts an annual essay contest for 7th & 8th grade students in the Jackson area. The competition is sponsored by CABA's Law Related Education Committee. This year's winners, Shilarah Brown (left) and Jacob Gonzalez (right), are both students at Huey L. Porter Middle School in Canton. The awards ceremony was held May 21st.

SHILARAH BROWN

Essay Winners

JACOB GONZALEZ



STATE LAW LIBRARY OF MISSISSIPPI HOURS

GARTIN JUSTICE BUILDING

450 High Street, Jackson, MS 39201
601.359.3672 • Monday—Friday: 8am—5pm

2026 Holidays

Sept 7.....	Labor Day
Nov 11.....	Veterans Day
Nov 26.....	Thanksgiving Day
Dec 25.....	Christmas Day



OFFICERS

Graham Carner
President
John T. Rouse
Secretary—Treasurer

Lindsay Thomas Dowdle
Vice President
Melissa S. Scott
Past President

DIRECTORS

Ann Chandler—**Post 1**
Matthew Thompson—**Post 2**
Mary Largent Purvis—**Post 3**
Hunter Ransom—**Post 4**

Christina Nunez
President, Jackson Young Lawyers
La'Bria Barnes
President-Elect, Jackson Young Lawyers

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Lindsay Williams

NEWSLETTER EDITORIAL BOARD

A. Kate Margolis—**Editor**

Chad Hammons
Terry Massey
Nathan Smith
Deborah Challener
Jim Rosenblatt

Correspondence regarding the newsletter should be directed to: CABA Newsletter Editor, 151 E. Griffith Street, Jackson, MS 39201. Letters to the editor must be signed, but the writer's name will be withheld upon request. Telephone inquiries should be made to the Executive Director at 601.969.6097.

Visit our website at www.caba.ms

Newsletter and website design by Crema Design Studio, Ridgeland, MS
www.cremadesignstudio.com