

AUSTIN LAWYER

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE AUSTIN BAR ASSOCIATION

austinbar.org

SEPTEMBER 2016 | VOLUME 25, NUMBER 7

Betty Blackwell Honored with Warren Burnett Award

Longtime Austin Bar member Betty Blackwell was awarded the 2016 State Bar of Texas Warren Burnett Award. The Legal Services to the Poor in Criminal Matters Committee created the award, named for the late legendary Texas attorney Warren Burnett, to recognize extraordinary contributions to improving the quality of criminal legal representation to indigents in Texas. The award honors either an individual or organization for their work in the courtroom, legislature, or in the public space.

Blackwell won the Warren Burnett Award for her decades of tireless commitment to indigent defense culminating in her stellar leadership as President of the Board of Directors of the Capital Area Private Defender Service.

A criminal law practitioner who is Board Certified in Criminal Law, Blackwell received a J.D. with honors from the University of Texas School of Law in 1980. She served as chair of the Commission for Lawyer Discipline from 2006-2011, as presiding director/

president of the Criminal Law Section of the State Bar of Texas, the Austin Criminal Defense Lawyers Association, and the Texas Criminal Defense Lawyer's Association. She was appointed by Governor Ann Richards to the Texas Punishment Standards Commission that rewrote the Texas Penal Code, and by Governor George Bush to the committee that rewrote the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure. She served as an Adjunct Professor of Law at the University of Texas Criminal Defense Clinic, and oversees the Austin Criminal Defense Lawyers Association's Annual Ethics Seminar each year.

She has lectured at the Advanced Criminal Law Seminar for the State Bar of Texas and at the Rusty Duncan Advanced Criminal Law Seminar for more than 10 years. In addition, she and Judge Michael McCormick authored a three-volume treatise for West Publishing Company titled *Texas Criminal Forms and Trial Manual*.

According to Kelli Bailey, president of the ACDLA, "Extraordinary. This is the word that springs to mind

when one thinks of Betty Blackwell. Her commitment to improving the quality of representation to the poor is only outdone by her ability to make it happen. Since 2012, Betty has selflessly given hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of hours of her time to the Capital Area Private Defender Service. She has never, never wavered in the mission of improving criminal defense for the poor. She told the world we could make a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable and we have."

When asked how it feels to receive the award, Blackwell responded, "I can't tell you how much this means to me. I once drove 200 miles just to hear Warren Burnett speak at one of his last CLE presentations. He was inspirational, brilliant and well worth the effort to hear him. To receive an award named after such an incredible lawyer, is beyond my wildest expectations.

I am so proud of the work done by the Capital Area Private Defender Service. Modeled after Lubbock's private defender service, we are twice the size with a huge case load. Yet our three-person staff



Betty Blackwell

has tackled the impossible job of supervising over 200 attorneys, verifying information when authorizing payments, taking and resolving client complaints and mentoring young lawyers, with the goal of improving the quality of court appointed counsel. As President of the Board of Directors, it has been my privilege to oversee this extraordinary experiment in a new method of providing counsel to the most vulnerable of our citizens." **AL**