

The NLAP Legacy

Last issue I promised a good news edition. This is it. The Nebraska Supreme Court has agreed to increase its assistance to the Nebraska Lawyers Assistance Program (NLAP).

This support, along with the NSBA's contribution, ensures the success and continued growth of a program that dates back to the 1990s, when then-President John Brownrigg proposed a formal lawyers' assistance program to augment the volunteer work of the NSBA Drug and Assistance Committee. An ABA study was conducted, followed by NSBA committee examinations. During the year-long examination, there was some sentiment that impaired lawyers should take care of themselves. Why should the profession be responsible for lawyers who have an addiction problem? There were government programs, and the criminal justice system, if necessary, to provide help. After all, isn't this a private matter for each lawyer? Then there were others who did not believe the legal profession had an addiction problem. There was some debate about the cost, which by today's standards was a pittance. It included a qualified part-time director, office space, administrative staff, and travel expenses.

This extended examination enlightened many of us to the breadth and perniciousness of addiction in our profession. We came to understand how important it was for the Association to provide a modicum of protection for the public, our clients and our colleagues. In the end, we created a program that has withstood the test of time. NLAP is one of the best services that the NSBA provides (with financial support from the Nebraska Judicial Branch), and it is available to every Nebraska lawyer and law student in need of assistance.

To our good fortune twenty-plus years ago, there was a Nebraska lawyer who was already providing addiction assistance to fellow lawyers as a member of the NSBA Drug and Alcoholism Committee. He fully appreciated addiction and the recovery process. He was one of us, a practicing attorney who understood what it was to be a lawyer. He understood the deadlines, the pressure, and the professional responsibility to provide services to a client. He was someone who could personally and credibly relate to a fellow lawyer. Most importantly, he was willing to make room in his practice to head a lawyers' assistance program. I recall the final House of Delegates vote and the praise heaped upon Rick Allan that day.



Hon. Joseph F. Bataillon

I doubt we appreciated it then, but our words of praise continue to echo the truth. In the following pages of this magazine you will read about this legal hero. He made NLAP one of the finest lawyers' assistance programs in the country. He recruited a core cadre of lawyers who assist our impaired sisters and brothers, their families, clients, the courts and the public. He expanded NLAP to provide assistance to lawyers facing any type of issue that impairs their ability to practice, including cognitive decline, stress, depression, and more.

Now, after more than 20 years of service, Rick has decided that it is time for him to scale back his work. Therefore, it is time for us to find a new director. A committee composed of members and staff from the NSBA, the Nebraska Supreme Court and NLAP is working diligently to find a suitable replacement for Rick.

It is imperative we continue to build this program. It must continue to provide confidential assistance to help lawyers recover from problems that impair their ability to responsibly practice law. With the court's continued financial assistance, I have no doubt a future president will be singing NLAP's praise another 20 years from now. Today, however, we need to thank Rick for his service and his continuing efforts to help those of us in need. 

Please join the NSBA in wishing Rick well at the Lincoln Country Club on June 29, 2017, from 3:00 pm - 6:00 pm.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Bataillon".

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