

HENNEPIN LAWYER



Vince Louwagie
2018-2019 HCBF President
+ Profiles in Practice



Introducing Vince Louwagie

Hennepin County
Bar Foundation
2018-2019 President



Vince Louwagie is the president of the Hennepin County Bar Foundation (HCBF), which serves as the charitable arm of the HCBA. He is a shareholder at Anthony Ostlund Baer & Louwagie, and he has been an active member of the HCBF for a number years.

What inspired you to join the Hennepin County Bar Foundation Board, and serve as an officer?

I have been involved in bar association activities for much of my more than 30-year legal career. My partners at Anthony Ostlund Baer & Louwagie have always encouraged our lawyers to be active in bar associations. It is an important part of our firm's culture, and it is something our lawyers embrace.

I joined the HCBF board several years ago after being invited by another board member. I agreed to do it without really knowing what I was getting into. In fact, I had never focused on the HCBF as being the separate, charitable arm of the HCBA. I had never taken the time to understand what wonderful things the HCBF does for the people of Hennepin County, and for our legal community.

As I became more involved with the HCBF, I learned that its mission, "Promoting equal access to justice for the people of Hennepin County," is more than just a collection of words. I saw first-hand the dedication of the lawyers on the grant review committee who spend countless volunteer hours to ensure that the money entrusted to the HCBF through its fundraising activities are well used by making grants to efficient and effective nonprofits whose focus is to empower those in need in our county. I saw first-hand the hard work of the board and staff in fundraising, primarily through the annual Bar Benefit and the annual golf tournament.

The HCBF is instrumental to the local legal community. Having a charitable giving organization play a prominent role in the community helps enhance the reputation and image of the entire legal community. In short, we look good by doing good.

I should say that serving on the leadership team for the HCBF has been a great experience. I have been able to learn from my predecessors who did a wonderful job as stewards of the Foundation. During my year as president, I hope I can maintain the quality of their stewardship.

I also learned that there is still much more that we can do. Many needs go unmet. The HCBF focuses on helping people with less familiarity with the legal system get the help that they need. Last year we were able to make grants to 15 organizations totaling \$206,150, including significant grants to our affiliated organization, the Volunteer Lawyers Network, which is the pro bono arm of the Hennepin County Bar Association. There were still 18 organizations seeking over \$ 50,000 in grants that we were unable to make. I am inspired and energized by the positive impact the HCBF can have, and I know the board members feel the same way.

From your experience as a lawyer, what perspective do you bring to the Foundation?

I have been involved with a number of law-related nonprofits over my career, and I have seen the necessity and power of fund-raising efforts. I have seen that successful nonprofits need boards of directors who take their fundraising responsibilities seriously. The HCBF's mission is a natural fit for the lawyers of Hennepin County, and the board must serve two very important functions: grant analysis and fundraising. Grant analysis is a real value added by the HCBE I personally count on the HCBF to help me decide how much of my charitable giving is ultimately spent.

But fundraising activities are also important, and increasingly so. This year we will continue a trend that has existed for several years of increasing the responsibility that each director will have to engage in our fundraising efforts. I believe this is very important to the long-term success of the HCBF, and to the impact it can have in our community.

What's new with the HCBF this year?

The year 2018 marked the HCBF's 50th anniversary, and we are celebrating that landmark in style. I'm very excited about a new HCBF Fellows program. The Fellows is an honorary society of distinguished attorneys, judges, law faculty, and legal scholars who have demonstrated dedication to upholding

the standards of the legal profession and commitment to the mission of the HCBE. Fellows will be nominated by board members, and then approved by the entire board. There will be several events throughout the year to celebrate the Fellows and their involvement with the HCBF Foundation.

The Fellows program has been very well received. I really look forward to the new events and the continued involvement of the Fellows to make the Foundation an even more social and vibrant organization.

The golf tournament and Bar Benefit also featured some new elements to commemorate the 50th anniversary.

How can HCBA members engage in and support the Foundation in the coming year?

There are many ways. If you weren't there, you already missed a very successful golf tournament. [Editor's Note: Check out a recap later in this issue.] You can sign up for it for next year, and you can join the golf committee, which did a fabulous job finding sponsors and putting on a great event. If you are a golfer, it is an event you shouldn't miss. If you are not a golfer, you can do the bike ride, "Pedal for Justice," or come for the dinner and craft beer fest.

HCBA members should also be sure to attend, and volunteer to help organize the annual Bar Benefit, which is a signature social event of the year for the HCBA, including a number of games, a VLN silent auction, good food and great revelry. This event is always a great time to see your colleagues.

Members can also apply to be on the HCBF board. This might be the greatest contribution that an HCBA member can make. If you really want to make a difference, being on the HCBF board is one of the best ways.

HCBA members can, of course, make tax-deductible contributions directly to the HCBF by going online at: www.hcba.org/donate.

What impact is the Foundation making in the community?

The HCBF makes a big impact. Our impact report, [which is on the following page] shows that we made grants totaling \$126,250 to Volunteer Lawyers Network, and Community Grants totaling almost \$80,000.

Those total over \$206,000, and is the most the HCBF has ever made in its 50-year history. Grant recipients included nonprofits focused on women's issues, civil rights, resources for victims of domestic abuse, Native American rights, and many others. Some were for specific purposes, others were sustaining grants.

The impact report also shows that your HCBF's grants impacted nearly 20,000 people in Hennepin County in the last fiscal year. It is our goal to reach even more, and to be able to make even larger grants this year.

What would you like members of the HCBA to know about you?

Wow. That's a tough one. Maybe how to pronounce my name? [Laughs] Although I'm sure some readers and my wife might disagree, I try not to take myself too seriously. I like to have fun. I have a family of four adult sons, three daughters-in-law/significant others, my wife of 33 years, and a six-month old fox-red Labrador Retriever who we've been trying desperately to train.

I've been fortunate enough to have excellent mentors and partners in the legal business, and they have taught me that you can work hard, earn a good living, and still do good for the community. That's what I'm trying to do.

You're an avid bicyclist, what's your favorite ride in the Twin Cities?

There are many HCBA members who ride a lot more often, faster, and further than I do. But I do like to ride, and I often ride in the Twin Cities, almost weekly with the HCBA bike club on Wednesday evenings. I also often ride near our lake cabin in Northwest Wisconsin. My favorite route in the Twin Cities so far is one I took for the first time at this year's Pedal for Justice ride, which was a companion activity for the golf tournament. It was a 22-mile ride. We started at Oak Ridge Country Club, where our colleagues were golfing, and rode into Chanhassen, between Alban's Bay and Lake Minnetonka, and back along the Three Rivers Trails—beautiful scenery, very little interaction with traffic, and manageable hills. I encourage people to sign up for it for next year; I would guess we will choose the same route again.