

Local Bar Associations Successfully Implement They Had a Dream Too

By Michele Hyndman

This year's public service project, *They Had a Dream Too: Young Leaders of the Civil Rights Movement* (THADT), has jumped off to a great start! Many local bar associations have successfully implemented their versions of THADT and are eager to share their successes in hopes that other affiliates around the country will be inspired to implement THADT in their communities.

Just in case you have not been in the loop, THADT focuses on young leaders who changed the world by fighting for equality for all before the law. This year's service project, inspired by these young leaders, is designed to motivate and develop young leaders of the future.

Two local bar associations are eager to share their stories about implementing THADT. The Austin Young Lawyers Association (AYLA) and the Young Lawyers Section of the Birmingham Bar Association (YLS BBA) encourage other affiliates to copy, modify, or improve on their programs.

The Austin Young Lawyers Association

AYLA implemented THADT on both a large and small scale. Each year, it holds an invitation-only event at the State Capitol in honor of Martin Luther King's birthday for 250 area high school students. AYLA contacts the high schools' principals and teachers and encourages them to select the students who would most benefit from the once in a lifetime experience—not necessarily the student body president or valedictorian. Although the presentation varies each year, the goal is the same: to educate young people in the Austin community that no voice or person is too small to make a difference.

David Courreges of AYLA explained that a typical formal program is a full day of learning about young leaders and teaching students how to become young leaders. The day begins with a welcome from a young lawyer and a member of the Texas Supreme Court followed by an introduction to the film (found at www.abanet/yld/thadt.org). After viewing the film, students are addressed by a keynote speaker. Former speakers include: Professor Norma Cantu, featured in the film; Carolyn Wright, the first African-American Chief Justice of a Texas Court of Appeal; and Pete Laney, the Speaker of the Texas House of Representatives. The keynote address is followed by a spirited question and answer session during which participating students have the opportunity to win fabulous prizes.

After this formal program, students tour the State Capitol grounds while focusing on the concepts learned during the film. The day ends with a tour of the Lyndon Johnson Presidential Library.

Last year in conjunction with its Vote America Project, AYLA instituted a new requirement, obligating participating schools to host a presentation of THADT for their junior and senior classes. As a result, every senior in Austin, Texas, was able to participate and AYLA reached over 5,000 Austin high school students in five days.

The Young Lawyers Section of the Birmingham Bar Association

Stephen Still, a member of YLS BBA, explained that, although implementing THADT was relatively painless, the young lawyers encountered small issues that could have been avoided if they had the advice provided to you in this article.

For YLS BBA, implementation began when Stephen Pudner, also a member of the YLS BBA, contacted the Alabama Civil Rights Institute, which provided him a great list of willing and enthusiastic speakers among other resourceful information. Once the speakers were arranged, Abigail Morrow and Stephen Still contacted local schools and scheduled the program based on the most convenient time and date for the schools and speakers.

Based on their experiences, Stephen Still and Abigail Morrow provided the timeline below and some advice for other local bar associations interested in implementing a THADT program in their communities:

American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division *The Affiliate*

- **Spring:** Begin planning in the spring for the following school year to avoid scheduling conflicts.
 - Determine the extent of your program launch (i.e., one school, two schools, a metro area).
 - Contact the principals and teachers of various schools to avoid school scheduling conflicts (i.e, pep rallies, large sporting or concert events, among others).
 - Contact the head of the history department or U.S. history teachers (most high schools post contact information on their websites) and explain THADT and the program you are planning. (A phone call followed by an e-mail with the link has proven most helpful.)
 - If multiple history classes, suggest that classes come together for the presentation.
 - Remain in continuous contact with teachers to field questions and assist in determining ways to integrate the program with the history curriculum.
- **Summer:** Contact local lawyers to present to the classes for the following school year.
 - Build a database of lawyers with practice area preferences such as civil rights, voting rights, constitutional law, and so on, willing to speak to students.
 - Contact and schedule primary and backup lawyers to present in overlapping practice areas to ensure availability.
 - Reconnect with contacts at the schools and schedule firm dates and times for speakers.
 - Reconnect with speakers and confirm schedules.
 - Plan to show the film to the students early in the school year so the speaker series then references back for the remainder of the year.
 - Send letters thanking participating schools for their interest and involvement.
- **Fall:**
 - Confirm speakers two days before actual events and have the database ready for fill-ins.

Advanced planning for your THADT project is the key! Stephen Still recommends that everyone in the planning stages make initial contact with the schools early. He reports that initial contact was the most difficult because principals and teachers are extremely busy during the school year. Thus, although multiple e-mails and phone calls may seem burdensome, the effort will prove beneficial for all involved. Once the YLS BBA made contact, principals and teachers were eager to participate in the program.

We hope the success of the AYLA and the YLS BBA motivates you to implement your own THADT project. For more information, go to www.abanet.org/yld/thadt.

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