

Five Louisiana State Bar Association members were selected as recipients of 2012-13 Crystal Gavel Awards. Three recipients—attorney Ryan E. Gatti of Bossier City, law professor John K. Pierre of Baton Rouge and attorney Michael S. Walsh of Baton Rouge — are profiled in this issue. The other two recipients — attorney Wilson C. Boveland of New Orleans and Judge James R.E. (Jim) Lamz of Slidell — were profiled in the February/March 2013 *Louisiana Bar Journal*.

Ryan E. Gatti maintains a solo practice in Bossier City. He was selected to receive a Crystal Gavel Award for his commendable efforts in aiding the administration of justice by gathering and reviewing a significant numbers of cases on behalf of the 26th Judicial District Court.

Two separate Bossier solo practitioners within a six-week period were suspended from the practice of law and the court was asked to appoint an attorney to take possession of their files and contact their clients. The situation was exacerbated by months of neglect of the files by the suspended attorneys, as well as the fact that one of the attorneys had relocated to Texas and the other suffered from psychological and substance abuse problems. After the first attorney's suspension, the court reached out to the Bossier Bar in hopes of forming a committee to address the predicament, so that the burden would not fall on the shoulders of one attorney alone. Gatti's immediate response was that he'd be happy to assume responsibility for the gathering and review of the files. When the second attorney was suspended within six weeks, Gatti again immediately stepped up to volunteer his services to the court by taking possession of the client files.

Gatti quickly began the task of collecting the files, spread over several locations and storage areas. He thoroughly reviewed the



Ryan E. Gatti of Bossier City recently received the Crystal Gavel Award from Louisiana State Bar Association District 8 representative Karelia Stewart during a ceremony on April 9 at the Bossier Parish courthouse. Photo provided by Gatti Law Firm.

records and contacted each of the clients by mail to inform them of the situation and of the need to seek out additional legal representation. A conservative estimate is that he and his staff spent more than 40 hours to accomplish this notification. Subsequently, he spoke with former clients of the affected attorneys as they made contact with him.

"This court was extremely impressed, but not surprised, by the professional and ethical manner in which Mr. Gatti performed," said Hon. Parker Self, chief judge of the 26th Judicial District Court. "Mr. Gatti's sense of honor and duty are well known in this community. I am certain that his efforts served to restore the faith in the legal profession of those persons who had been adversely affected by the actions of these attorneys."

Gatti earned his law degree from Louisiana State University Paul M. Hebert Law Center.

John K. Pierre is a law professor and Vice Chancellor for Institutional Accountability and Evening Division at Southern University Law Center (SULC). He was

selected to receive a Crystal Gavel Award for his outstanding work and efforts in educating individuals about legal matters through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program.

Pierre's strong background in tax accounting led to a passion for helping families learn about and ultimately achieve financial stability and independence. To that end, he has established a Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program site hosted by the Low-Income Taxpayer Law Clinic at SULC. He also worked to establish an Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Day each year at the law center, a special day set aside with the goal of reaching large groups of people with an annual income under \$50,000 from wages, self-employment or farming income to assist them with tax preparation issues. Because of his foresight, the SULC VITA site was named the Best in the Baton Rouge Area Coalition and was chosen as VITA Site of the Year in 2010. Pierre also received special recognition for his outstanding public service through the Stakeholder Partnerships, Education and Communication (SPEC); VITA; and Tax