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Lawyers as Leaders
Lawyers have served in leadership roles in Houston since the city's earliest days. The Houston Bar Association was founded in 1870, less than 35 years after the Allen Brothers purchased land near the headwaters of Buffalo Bayou and began to build the city. More than 180 years later, lawyers still hold leadership roles in government, business, philanthropy, education, civic improvement and many other institutions that have shaped Houston.

"The Room Where It Happens": In Chambers with Chief Judge Lee Rosenthal

By Alex Roberts

Chief U.S. District Court Judge Lee Rosenthal is widely regarded as "smarter than a tree full of owls." It is fitting, then, that Judge Rosenthal recently concluded an eight-year tenure on Rice University's Board of Trustees (Rice's mascot is the Owls). The Houston Lawyer wanted to learn why Judge Rosenthal maintains an extensive commitment to service, both within the law and among the broader community.

THL: What motivated you to take on a leadership position in higher education? Why Rice in particular?

Judge Rosenthal: I am fascinated by the challenges of education today, across the spectrum. I've been active in trying to understand what is occurring in law schools, how it affects the academy and the practice, and how the best schools and approaches can be fostered and the less successful identified and replaced. I'm now on the Board of the Baylor College of Medicine, learning about a very different type of education. Like the rest of the world, all these schools are struggling with all the changes modern technology has created. All these issues and challenges are fascinating. And important. And the people who devote their lives to education and research are generally smart, interesting, and admirable. It's a terrific combination—working with great people smarter than I am, on issues that are complex and important.

Rice in particular is near and dear. As a high school student, I spent lots of time at Rice, where my father was in the history department and my mother was at Fondren Library. I had summer jobs there before I went away to college. I came back after law school already keenly aware of how important Rice is to Houston. Its history is unusual, in that it moved from a regional institute focused on engineering and science to a nationally known university with excellence across the spectrum. It is also unusual in that it is a relatively small, excellent, private research university that has maintained its emphasis on educating undergraduates.

THL: What will you take away from your service on the Rice Board of Trustees?

Judge Rosenthal: My work with the fabulous board members, faculty, students, and administrators at Rice left me profoundly optimistic about Rice, yet at the same time, with some concerns for higher education in this country. Universities and colleges face demands that they become businesses, not institutions of higher learning. The decline in student interest in the humanities and social sciences, the decline in teaching jobs that deprives us of the potential contributions gifted scholars might make, are all serious concerns. Rice, and universities in general, must do a better job in explaining what they do, why it matters, how they do it, and in particular why the humanities and social sciences remain so vital to our society.

I am optimistic about Rice's future because the passion, innovation, and dedication of its leadership and faculty, and the excellence of the faculty and students, give me reassurance that it is thriving and will continue to do so. Rice has done an excellent job of moving "beyond the hedges." Rice has forged creative and effective relationships with the Texas Medical Center that benefit both Rice students and faculty and it continues to send terrific students to great law schools. Rice also provides its students robust support for internships and externships all over the city, with government and educational institutions as well as private industry. Yes, I am opti-
mistic, while keenly aware of the pressures and challenges that lie ahead.

**THL:** Why is it important for lawyers and judges to be involved in their communities?

**Judge Rosenthal:** First, we owe our city and community for the opportunities we’ve had here. And second, we need this involvement to be better lawyers and judges. It’s too easy for us to become narrowly focused on our day jobs. We learn a lot from people who don’t do what we do. I learned so much from my involvement with Rice. All of us need that leavening—that ability to continue to learn from and about the other people, other work, and other lives, that make up our fascinating and diverse city. And it’s fun! Our city has great and interesting people. The chance to meet them and learn from them is just terrific.

Why did I love the work at Rice? To paraphrase a line from the musical Hamilton, I was in one of the many rooms in this city where it happens. I’m grateful daily for what I learn in each of those rooms.

Alex Roberts is a trial partner at Beck Redden LLP. He served as a judicial law clerk to Judge Rosenthal from 2006 to 2007.

**Lawyers Leading in the Arts**

**Contracts, Statutes, and Gunpowder at The Museum of Fine Arts Houston**

By Cindy Dinh

Carlotta Hall Ramirez weaves around clusters of schoolchildren on a field trip as she crosses the underground connection inside the Museum of Fine Arts Houston (MFAH)—James Turrell’s iconic “The Light Inside” with its fluorescent pink cast against an infinite black. Earlier that morning, Ramirez answered a telephone call from her supervisor, the Director of MFAH. On the day I met her, she will meet with members of the curatorial department to discuss the legal implications of acquiring objects containing ivory. Ramirez serves as MFAH’s museum counsel, a position that has evolved since she started her career with MFAH ten years ago.

“The Museum has always been in the background of my life,” she said. “I had always been drawn to the non-profit sector, and we have such a rich, vibrant community in Houston.”

Her path to in-house counsel to the largest museum in the South is rather unusual. Ramirez has no formal educational background or training in the fine arts, but she nonetheless developed an interest...