

THE ANNUAL MALCOLM MONROE FEDERAL PRACTICE SEMINAR

The New Orleans Chapter of the Federal Bar Association (“FBA”) recently hosted its annual Malcolm Monroe Federal Practice Seminar and Admission to the Federal Courts in Louisiana. This event showcased a day dedicated to welcoming new attorneys to the federal bar. The event combined practical legal advice, ethical guidance, and professional development, culminating in the formal admission of the attendees to the federal courts.

The day began with a warm welcome from Chief Judge Wendy Vitter, who encouraged the new admittees to get involved with the New Orleans Chapter of the FBA, noting its distinction as the largest FBA chapter in the country.

Chief Judge Vitter set the tone for the day by emphasizing two critical themes that would resonate throughout the sessions. First, to know your local rules. Second, prioritize ethics and professionalism as these are the two most significant factors that will shape an attorney’s reputation throughout their career.

Following the opening remarks, Eric Barefield, ethics counsel for the LSBA Ethics Advisory Service Committee, engaged the audience with an interactive “Ethics Pop Quiz”. Attendees used their phones to answer questions. Throughout all of the clever questions, Mr. Barefield repeatedly reinforced a key takeaway: while knowing the ABA Model Rules is important, lawyers must also learn the specific ethics rules of each state where they practice as those sometimes differ from the ABA Model Rules.

Next up, A panel of former federal judicial law clerks provided a unique “behind the scenes” perspective. Speakers Elen D. George, Margaret Manning, and Jesse C. Stewart shared tips from their time in chambers. Their advice reinforced Chief Judge Vitter’s earlier sentiments, urging attorneys to follow local rules and always maintain appropriate courtroom decorum. Additional practical tips from the former clerks included to proofread everything, communicate effectively, and always be the clerk who “chases down everything.”

After a short break, The “Lawyering 101” panel was up next. This panel featured Kathryn W. Munson, T.C. Wicker, and Amanda Collura-Day. The panel focused on the fundamentals of daily practice. One speaker jokingly—yet accurately—retitled the session “How to learn how to love being a lawyer”. The panel offered concrete strategies for managing a legal career, such as utilizing a “tickler system” to track files, leaning on support staff, and maintaining clear communication with clients. They also highlighted the importance of work-life balance, noting that personal well-being directly impacts professional performance, and encouraged involvement in local bar associations.

The educational portion of the day concluded with a powerful session on implicit bias led by Magistrate Judge Janis van Meerveld and Loyola Law Professor William Snowden. They discussed how stereotypes and assumptions are embedded in everyone’s minds—often without conscious knowledge. The speakers provided tools to recognize and address these biases, aiming to create a legal community where growth and advancement are open to all.

The event concluded with the moment everyone had been waiting for, the swearing-in ceremony. Chief Judge Wendy Vitter formally swore in the admittees to the Federal District Courts in Louisiana and the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, marking the official beginning of their federal practice.