

LASO also partnered with the Oregon Law Center and the Center for Nonprofit Legal Services to create a disaster relief website — [oregondisasterlegalservices.org](http://oregondisasterlegalservices.org) — where fire victims could get help with a variety of legal issues, and a Disaster Assistance Panel composed of lawyer volunteer who stood ready to provide critical legal assistance to low-income wildfire survivors.

One of the key areas of need involved assisting FEMA applicants who faced ineligibility because of lost documentation (lease agreements, deeds, photo IDs, etc.). FEMA received approximately 20,000 applications for assistance from fire victims, and up to 40 percent of those applicants faced ineligibility challenges.

“The timelines for FEMA claims are tight,” Reeves and the chief justice wrote in encouraging lawyers to volunteer. “Victims have 30 days from the date of the disaster declaration to file their claims with FEMA. If their claims are denied, they have 60 days to appeal. Having the advice and guidance of a lawyer during this process could make a tremendous difference for our neighbors who are already dealing with devastating losses.”

Other areas of need included contracts for housing repairs; power of attorney/ estate administration; insurance claims (life,

medical, property, etc.); mortgage foreclosure; guardianship and conservatorships; consumer protection; and housing challenges. (The program does not cover cases that will produce a money award.)



Faith Morse

put out a call to members, some of whom were evacuated themselves, to help out.

Among them was Faith Morse, who practices with Andersen Morse & Linthorst in Medford. She and her husband were forced to leave their home and spent their first couple of days driving around with their horse trailer, helping neighbors move their horses to the county fairgrounds, which had been designated as a shelter for displaced families. By the first weekend after the fires, she was helping people file insurance claims from a makeshift office there.

“We were blessed. Our home is standing and the fire got very close, but we’re fine,” Morse says. “But a lot of people down here aren’t. Seeing the absolute devastation and

As part of its outreach effort, the bar invited calls from wildfire victims to its Referral & Information Services staff. OTLA created its own hotline, established a list of frequently asked questions and

hearing the stories is just ... heartbreaking, heart-wrenching — and that doesn’t cover it. The devastation is just jaw-dropping.

“I saw how much my community was hurting and I looked around and thought, ‘What can I do that will help?’” Morse adds. “I can’t drive heavy equipment to help people move the rubble, and I can’t swing a hammer as effectively as someone who does that professionally. But I can do insurance claims.”



Marc Johnston

OTLA organized a pro bono services station at Talent Elementary School, a designated FEMA response site, to help people register for FEMA support, file insurance claims and take care of matters with the Small Business Administration, among other work. It also sent attorneys out into the community to meet with people who couldn’t come to them.

“We’re trying to be flexible in that way as well,” Morse says. “It’s an honor and a privilege to help people out when they need it, and if we all pull together as a community, we will get through this.”

Portland attorney Marc Johnston lives in Clackamas County, and he and his family also were forced to evacuate when wildfires approached. He says he had the luxury of staying in a beach house in Pacific City, but saw many people with their belongings packed in cars, trucks and trailers on his way out of town.

“I thought to myself, ‘I’ve got to do something’ because, number one, I can. I know about making insurance companies honor their obligations,” he says. “I knew it was going to be a huge undertaking and it has been, but it was something I had to do.”

Johnston was among the OTLA members who organized a series of 12 training videos that provide information from lawyers who specialize in fire-related claims and are available for volunteers. The volunteers have led pro bono sessions in Molalla, Estacada and other cities and plan to continue them.

Johnston notes that this year’s wildfires have created a foundation for OTLA to prepare for even better disaster response in the future.



Ferocious fires pushed by raging winds and helped by low humidity left a path of destruction throughout Oregon in late summer, in some cases wiping out entire neighborhoods and small towns. At one point, the Red Cross alone had more than 300 people on the ground in fire-ravaged communities, working with more than 1,700 families who had lost everything. Photo by Jaime Valdez



“We have sort of the bones of what we’re going to do, how we can organize it, so we can be more effective quicker and help people sooner,” he says.

### Looking Ahead

What lies ahead for Oregon’s legal community as it deals with what OSB President Reeves calls “this time of challenge and change”? For some, it will mean joining the rest of the business community in adapting to a new way of getting work done.

“It (has been) incredibly depressing to see the office closures, layoffs and furloughs and to see all of these people going through this dramatic period,” says Barran Liebman’s Schpak. “Some firms had to put employees and staff on partial salaries, and firms that moved into new space and signed a giant lease in the past few years now have a huge commercial lease payment each month. Those organizations are hurting, and some are in conversations to give back a floor if they are on multiple floors, not only to lower that monthly expense but for the long term if more people want to continue working from home.”



Deputy Marshal Jon Gadberry picks up some of the nearly 100,000 masks that have been donated for use in Oregon courthouses as part of a drive coordinated by the Oregon Association of Defense Counsel. The effort was initiated over the summer by the Oregon Judicial Department, which estimates the need at 1,200-1,500 masks per day for jurors, employees or visitors who come to court without them. Photo courtesy of Geoff Horning/OADC

Several large law firms had already been experimenting with working remotely before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, but the state’s stay-at-home order showed that it could be a successful strategy for many attorneys.

“We’ve had to get really good at communication within the firm, since I can’t just walk to someone’s desk and talk to them about something,” Morse says. “We were already electronic file-based and used case management software, so that didn’t change much. But mediation, depositions and hearings are all via Zoom now. That actually has been a fantastic change. I would have been very skeptical pre-COVID, but I’m not sure I’ll do in-person mediations again absent compelling circumstances. Video recording of depositions is easy as can be, and accommodating witnesses at a distance is a breeze now. It just simplifies things.”

While the loss of face-to-face meetings with clients, cybersecurity risks and the wellness challenges caused by isolation pose

concerns, the American Bar Association and law-related websites such as *Law360* and *Above the Law* report a growing number of firms are embracing remote work options and flexible schedules permanently. The benefits for both associates and managers include increased productivity, more positive engagement with work and improved quality of services to clients, according to *Above the Law*.<sup>4</sup>

Many attorneys, and particularly working parents, have noted that remote work and reduced hours have fostered a better work-life balance. Working from home has also helped some attorneys better empathize with their clients.

“With two young children and two full-time lawyers in my household, I am right there along with my clients navigating these challenges and fears,” Morris says. “Holding this with my clients and bearing witness to their unique challenges has infused my practice with so much meaning, and it gives me a lot of strength to continue holding the center, both professionally and personally.”

Earlier this year, the ABA and *Working Mother* magazine partnered to create a list of top law firms for women to highlight the fact that work flexibility is key to attracting and retaining the best employees. The list includes several firms with offices in Oregon, including Davis Wright Tremaine and Perkins Coie.<sup>5</sup>

Solo practitioners and small firms have faced their own set of challenges while transitioning to working remotely, much of which has involved technology. Resources from the ABA and the *2020 Solo and Small Firm Legal Technology Guide* have helped provide guidance, ranging from cybersecurity protection to legal software recommendations.<sup>6</sup> The guide was written by Sharon D. Nelson, John W. Simek and Michael C. Maschke, founders of Sensei Enterprises Inc., and published by ABA Publishing.

“The year 2020 will be remembered as the moment in time when lawyers were catapulted into the future,” say Nelson and Simek, who share “lessons learned” in their Technology & the Law column on Page 48 of this month’s *Bulletin*. “Some were prepared for working remotely, but many were not.”

In October, Clio’s Legal Trends Report was released in conjunction with the Clio Cloud Conference. Among the trends it spotted:

- 96 percent of lawyers say they’ll store firm data in the cloud in the future;
- 95 percent say they’ll support electronic documents and signatures;
- 96 percent say they’ll accept electronic payments;
- 96 percent say they’ll use practice management software; and
- 83 percent say they’ll meet clients through videoconferencing.

Oregon’s courts also are continuing to adapt to changing conditions related to the pandemic, with a series of orders from Chief Justice Walters regarding Level 2 and Level 3 restrictions on court operations, closures of courts and OJD offices, remote appearances during arraignments and other proceedings, and the use of face coverings in courts, among other issues.<sup>7</sup>

Physical damage has impacted the court system as well. Gatherings that began peacefully often devolved into violence late at night, causing about \$1.3 million in damage to the Multnomah County Central Courthouse and Justice Center in downtown Portland. Protesters also set fires and broke glass inside the federal courthouse, which was covered in graffiti shortly after the protests began. As