

Special Conference Edition



The Digest

Volume 8, Issue 7, July 2015

Special Edition

This special edition of the Digest is being mailed to every member and donor on RSOL's roster. We often find that we can measure our progress in terms of the outcomes of our annual conferences. If so, we think that RSOL has come a long way! —The editors

Looking Back—and Moving Forward

By Brenda Jones

Our seventh annual conference has finally come... and gone... and what a GREAT event it was! In the end, almost 200 people attended live or viewed live for at least a portion of the conference. That's nearly two-thirds again more than we had last year and far exceeds any previous conference attendance. Our presenters across the board were engaging, inspiring, and taught us so much! We were well fed and well treated, too!

Conferences for grass-roots organizations don't happen without a TON of work by many people... nor do they happen without significant financial cost. I'm also happy to report that we had many willing and capable volunteers at all levels this year and that we not only paid for all our expenses but also will be able to begin planning next year's conference with an existing budget!

Our increased numbers can be traced to several things: First, we got lots of support from our affiliate Texas Voices for Reason and Justice, who frequently posted notices to their email list. Second, National sent out a postcard mailing to about 5,000 registered citizens in the Dallas area inviting them to participate. Some were TVRJ members already, but others learned about us for the first time! We had many new state advocates and affiliate leaders attending from around the country this year also. It was wonderful to see so many new, enthusiastic faces.

We were pretty nervous about our

budget this year due to more speakers and more money spent on food, even though we had not increased the conference fee. Fortunately several of our speakers offered to pay their own transportation. Though the food budget was high, the increased attendance, a less expensive program booklet, and a very successful fundraising auction allowed us to come out in the green. Woo Hooo! Donations raised from the fundraising event will be applied to either the general or legal fund.

Finally, we were very fortunate to have a strong conference planning committee (CPC) and a great, hard-working cadre of volunteers. A thousand kudos to Larry and Dolley, who led the CPC this year, and to fellow members Rick, Lloyd, Josh, Ruth, and Ed for their many hours of dedicated effort. It really paid off with the best run, most trouble-free conference ever.

Mostly out of sight but very exciting was our live stream option: for the first time, people who were unable to travel to attend were able to partici-



Josh Gravens, Gail Colletta, and Brenda Jones in a panel on approaching legislators in your state.

pate remotely in real time! We announced it rather late, but still we managed to have a respectable number of folks who connected to listen live. The recordings have been uploaded and are now available as pay-per-view. So if you missed the conference live, you still have the opportunity to watch and listen.

I will leave it to others to report what they gained from the conference; I'll just close by again saying how wonderful it was to see our RSOL "family" again this year, to learn, grow, inspire, and even have a little fun together! Hope you will start saving and planning for next year!

No Judgments

By Dolley Madison

If not for the dedication of volunteers seeing the conference through from start to finish, those who donate their time during the conference to help out with all of the various tasks and duties, the presenters willing to give of their time, and those invaluable TEXANS, who put up with the rest of us, we couldn't have made it happen! Thank you to all of you who make it possible.

As I write this in an attempt to extend the deepest gratitude to all who make RSOL as an organization possible and recognize the significance of reform, I still become emotional when I think about the continued support and growth in our collective mission. From relentless new research to the strides made toward legal cases to the stories of personal strife and overcoming barriers through the support that this arena provides us, each and every element is important.

I was particularly moved by an attendee who patiently waited on us at the registration desk Thursday morn-

ing while we were busy ensuring that attendees were checked in. This was his first RSOL conference, and as I was not sure if he was totally comfortable, I decided to converse with him. He shared that he wasn't quite sure where he fit in, explaining that he does have one of those "worse cases."

I explained that I too hadn't been sure where I'd fit in when I began in advocacy because of a similar situation with my husband and because I believe that all people should be given a second chance after they have completed their sentencing. This man (who shall remain anonymous) encourages an atmosphere free from judgment and a place where poor decisions made in his past no longer define who he is.

There is a deeper rooted human aspect to all of this as to why the conference is so significant. It not only gives us valu-

able information, research, legal perspectives, and new found alliances, but it also creates acceptance, nourishment, encouragement, and hope. It's a standard we must strive to continue to support.

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communications@reformsexoffenderlaws.org

Address corrections should be sent to:

PO Box 36123, Albuquerque, NM 87176

Larry Neely, publisher

Sandy Rozek, editor-in-chief

Robin Vanderwall, managing editor

Brenda Jones, copy editor

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The Most Valuable Lessons

By Tim Burgess

The Dallas conference was an experience that taught me a number of things:

Support - Being a small state, Vermont has a tendency to feel alone in the struggle. There is a huge movement of legal professionals that are fighting for registrants. I met a number of contacts within the RSOL community with whom I could share stories and gather in fellowship. I had not traveled away from our small state and was riddled with anxiety about not knowing anybody and traveling alone. Once in Dallas, the friendly people accepted me as one of them and erased my anxiety.

Lessons learned - The speakers at the conference educated, informed, and inspired. There was not one of the seminars that I attended that I did not take some piece of information away from to help us in our effort here in Vermont.

Fun - That is not a term I thought I would be using after a conference that deals with issues of registrants, but sharing stories, talking to people, meeting new people, and hearing the stories from other states, in addition to being helpful and valuable, were also fun.

One word describes the event: amazing! Thank you; these are connections that will last a lifetime and inspire me to continue the movement and be grateful for the support and fellowship.

The Most Important
Thing To Know!

Inspiration

By Barry G. Porter

Just back from the 2015 RSOL Annual Conference, I am feeling inspired by the citizen-registrants, family members, and lawyers that I met during the 3 days.

The conference this year was extremely substantive with lots of ideas for attacking the real "monster" in the criminal justice system... the overly broad, overly burdensome, and ineffective registration schemes throughout our country.

My favorite LEGAL part of the conference was learning from other lawyers how they mounted successful constitutional attacks against SORNA laws in the different states. My favorite HUMAN part of the conference was meeting so many good people working to bring about some reform.

Quote of the Month:

"To accomplish great things, we must not only act, but also dream, not only plan, but also believe."

Anatole France

Most Meaningful of All

By Bob and Nancy Allen

As the parents of a registrant who is also mentally ill, we are constantly looking for information that may lead to ways we can help him have as near of a normal life as possible. The Tx Voices and RSOL Conferences give us hope when we see others who are working towards the same objectives, as well as legal, sociology and psychology professionals sharing their knowledge, skills, and time to help our loved ones. This conference was unique in my experience in the variety of subjects covered and the quality of the presentations.

The presentation by William Quinn was the most meaningful to us. Although we have worked with three different defense lawyers at different times on our son's behalf, we have never had one tell us what they needed from our son or us to help them build the best defense possible. Mr. Quinn put a bright spotlight on information that needs to be provided and actions to take that will help the defense attorney prepare thoroughly. He removed much of the "mystery" concerning the process from beginning to end.

Thanks to all who worked to make this conference a great success.

Perversion of Justice

By J.P. Welch

Clarke's commentary on the Bible verse, John 9:25, describes the key point for me at the 2015 RSOL National Conference, Public Registration – Untold Collateral Damage. Jesus has healed a blind man who is now responding to questions from the Pharisees. They strictly observed traditional and written law and thought themselves to be a superior class. In their minds, Jesus had broken the law by "working" on the Sabbath when he healed the man who was born blind. Clarke writes about the exchange, Whereas I was blind, now I see - He pays no attention... to their perversion of justice; but, in the simplicity of his heart, speaks to the fact, of the reality of which he was ready to give them the most substantial evidence.

Attorneys speaking at the conference didn't know registration law until a seemingly routine, but life-changing, event occurred for them - beginning a second career, taking a phone call from

a friend concerned about her son, reading a plumber's book, just following the lead of his partner.

None anticipated their careers would lead them to represent cases related to registrants. Each chose to review case law and present a research-based, studied position in the courtroom theater.

Many described as collateral damage – those closest to registrants – didn't know the law until life-changing events occurred for them. Just as those in the legal profession were blind, but now see, and now help others see the light, so can we. Each of us is presented with legislators, communities, public and private organizations, family and friends who are blind. While a daunting task, we will, from the simplicity of our hearts, speak to the facts, presenting substantial evidence from research. The only attention we'll pay to the perversion of justice is that which is necessary to correct it.

RSOL Letter Policy

We appreciate the many letters we receive from you, and we do respond to as many of them as possible. We ask that you adhere to the following guidelines when writing to us.

- Keep your letter short and on point (extremely long letters with extensive background are difficult for volunteers to decipher in terms of what you are asking);
- Print or use a typewriter if one is available at your institution;
- Only write on one side of standard size paper so that we may scan the document;
- Make sure that your address is visible on the letter because we do not retain the envelopes;
- We cannot answer letters asking what the registration laws are in a particular state;
- We cannot answer letters asking which state is best for sex offenders to reside in;
- We cannot answer letters seeking legal advice or opinions because no one here at RSOL is licensed to practice law.

From Our Advocate of the Year

By Mary Sue Molner

The 2015 RSOL Conference was once again a wonderful event, and I am proud to say that I have never missed a conference! It was great to see friends and advocates from across the states and to meet so many new folks. One of my favorite parts of a large get-together like this is being able to put a face to the name of people I have talked to over the phone or through emails.

The speakers were awesome, each with their own message of hope, each with their own way of presenting the facts and the research- the important information that we all need to know and understand.

Once again, the Friday night dinner and auction was a blast! Rick from New Mexico and Carla from Arkansas kept us laughing, and it was certainly nice to be able to laugh for a change.

Our Texas members are the best! They supplied the snacks and desserts for our Texas Voices Hospitality Table, and JoAnn and Earl worked hard to keep the table stocked and organized. What an awesome spread of

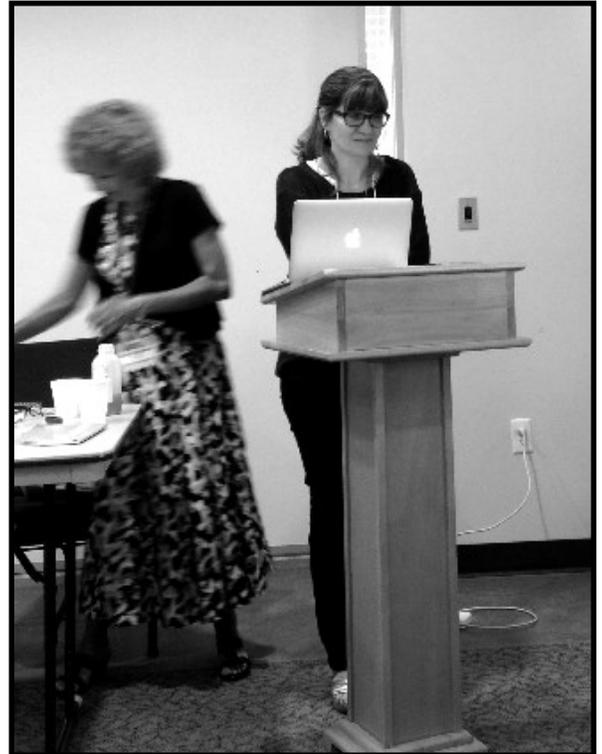
snacks we had for all to enjoy! RSOL appreciated the many Texas members who volunteered their time to help make this conference a success.

I would personally like to thank our Texas attorney, Richard Gladden for his thought-provoking and informative presentation on Online Identifiers and the Constitution. The handouts he prepared for attendees were much appreciated as well.

Last but not least, I was more than thrilled to receive the first award for RSOL Advocate of the Year. It was certainly an emotional moment for me, and I am proud to serve the community of people that I have come to love and respect.

Hope to see everyone (and more) again next year. Hats off to the RSOL Con-

ference Planning Committee who worked so hard to bring an amazing conference to Dallas.



Speaker Emily Horowitz prepares to begin as MC and Texas Voices director Mary Sue Molnar steps away.

An Overview

By Philip Kaso

This is my first attendance at an RSOL conference, and I found everything awesome.

Julie Baldwin and Tusty ten Bensel are a dynamic pair. The national survey these two conducted and are still conducting continues to shine a light on the organizations and their work to support registered citizens. Nancy Forster is an articulate public speaker and tireless advocate for registered citizens. The work she has done in Maryland to get hundreds of registrants removed from Maryland's registry is amazing and precedence setting.

The Brenda Jones-moderated panel on Legislative Advocacy Tips was a great session with which to gain tips and pointers. After attending, I feel much more comfortable in making a stand in West Virginia. I especially took to heart the point that building prior relationships with your legislators and other influential people were keys to success.

Steven Davidson's The Power of Family to Survive and

Succeed is a very powerful message. It's not just the registered citizen that must be in the trenches but rather his/her entire immediate and hopefully extended family.

Emily Horowitz's Protecting Our Kids? How Sex Offender Laws Are Failing Us is a powerful book and message written by a very powerful person. Eric Tennen's discussion on risk based versus offense based classification systems was compelling and important.

Janice Bellucci's and Chance Oberstein's Getting Rid of Presence Restrictions discussion was especially important to me as a local city ordinance where I live directly restricts me from taking my grandchildren to the only decent park in the area.

This was my first RSOL conference, but it certainly won't be my last! I gained more knowledge and information in these few days than I could have in a year's worth of research.

Reason to Hope

By Jennifer Van Waes

2008 was a pivotal year for me and my family. It was the year we were forced out of our home we had owned for 10 years because of the retroactive application of residency restrictions. It was also the year we attended our first RSOL conference, held in Boston, Massachusetts. It was by chance, through a desperate Internet search looking for anyone or anything to help us or give us hope, that I found RSOL. We attended that conference, shrouded with doubt and fear – characterized by the fact that those at the conference were reluctant to share their names, and the location was closely guarded for fear of retaliation and vigilantism that had become the part of so many attendees’ lives.

Fast forward to 2015 to another RSOL Conference, held this time in Dallas, Texas. Unlike that first experience, we walked into the conference venue and were immediately among friends – open, honest, and free to share ourselves and our stories. What a remarkable, welcomed and wonderful change! The two and a half days were well-spent learning from lawyers, researchers, and family members about efforts across the country to change the landscape for over 800,000 registered citizens and their families.

While at the conference, I was interviewed by a young reporter from the New Yorker magazine (and yes, I used my real name) and filmed by a crew creating a documentary about our reform movement. A question posed by the crew was “If you could change one thing now, what would it be?” My response was that what I hoped for was intelligent conversation and dialogue about human dignity and worth, even for those most despised. Perhaps then we can begin to change the laws affecting registered families.

As we mindfully considered many of the same issues for registered citizens that once plagued the LGBT community – blatant hate and disregard for human dignity – the Supreme Court announced its ruling in favor of same-sex

marriages. Max Lucado, a prolific and quite thoughtful Christian writer, had this to say about the recent ruling:

“Something good will come out of this. Maybe now we can have this discussion where we need to have it. Face-to-face. In neighborhoods. Over dinner tables. Perhaps the hate-filled words will subside and clear thinking will gain traction; the shouting will diminish and the heart-felt dialogue will increase.”

This is my hope. Thank you, RSOL, for giving me reason to hope.

Calendar of Events

- 7/14—Board of Directors (Admin Team) meeting
- 7/28—Advancing Advocacy*

* Our very special guest for July's Advancing Advocacy is Dr. Jill Levenson. She will discuss recent research about recidivism and implications for SORN laws. As well, she will discuss tips for advocates to convey messaging in a way that is understandable and persuasive to stakeholders.

Come prepared to ask questions about policy analysis, research, and advocacy.

Networking

By Gail Colletta

Two Florida Action Committee board members participated in the RSOL National Conference last week and both came away feeling inspired and hopeful. The networking opportunity was unparalleled among some of the best advocates in the country in this fight. We were thrilled to see how many participated this year. Our numbers are growing.

The presenters were all extraordinary, and we learned so much and gathered materials to support many of the reforms we are strongly promoting in Florida.

We encourage everyone to participate going forward. They get better and better. Thanks to EVERYONE who COORDINATED this year’s conference for a great experience.

Press Attention

One of our goals for the conference this year was to attract more media attention, and in that we were successful. Two local articles, one with video, came out prior to the conference and although they contain some factual errors, getting the coverage was good. Additionally, a reporter from the *New York Times* was at the conference and may yet write a piece, and a film crew was there who is producing an important documentary about the sex offender industry in general, and we will be a part of that.

All regular columns and content of the Digest will return with next month's edition.

There Is Life After the Registry

By Don Thurber

WOW! What can I say? As I sit in the gate at the airport, decompressing from the last few days at the RSOL National Conference, thoughts of “What now?” are tumbling through my head. The conference exceeded all my expectations with 2 ½ days packed with information and fellowship. A broad range of presentation topics has taken us from laws and legislatures to families, travel, jobs and business opportunities, struggles, successes, statistics, strategies, and hope. There is life on the registry! The dedication and enthusiasm of the presenters was truly inspiring, and I feel like a racehorse at the gate who just got a big shot of steroids!

As awesome as the presentation sessions were, an equally great part of the conference experience was the camaraderie of the participants. It was so great to meet (in person) a bunch of people with whom I’ve shared phone calls, emails, and web-conferences over the last few months—and even more with whom I’ve shared the common experience of life on the registry. Precious times of fellowship included both stories of heartbreak and victories and words of comfort and encouragement. I couldn’t possibly place a value on the priceless personal time spent with new friends this week.

The biggest take-home item for me

was the wealth of legal knowledge. Increased understanding of legal strategies, what can be challenged, and how to challenge them is helpful not only in actual reform litigation but also in defending registrants’ rights and influencing legislators. My brain is still spinning from all the legal considerations laid out before us, and I will be putting in some serious review time on some of the presentations. But my overall understanding of the whole legal arena has already been pumped up a level. Kudos, thanks, accolades, and probably a bunch of other things are due to the wonderful team of attorneys who have so courageously taken up the battle and who so generously gave of their time this past week to educate the rest of us. Bravo!

I cringed a bit at the thought of trying to pick a highlight because everything was so good. But after letting everything settle a little, rising above the memories of the past few days are the spirited presentations by Janice Bellucci. Janice’s dedication and enthusiasm for the cause could inspire a granite statue!

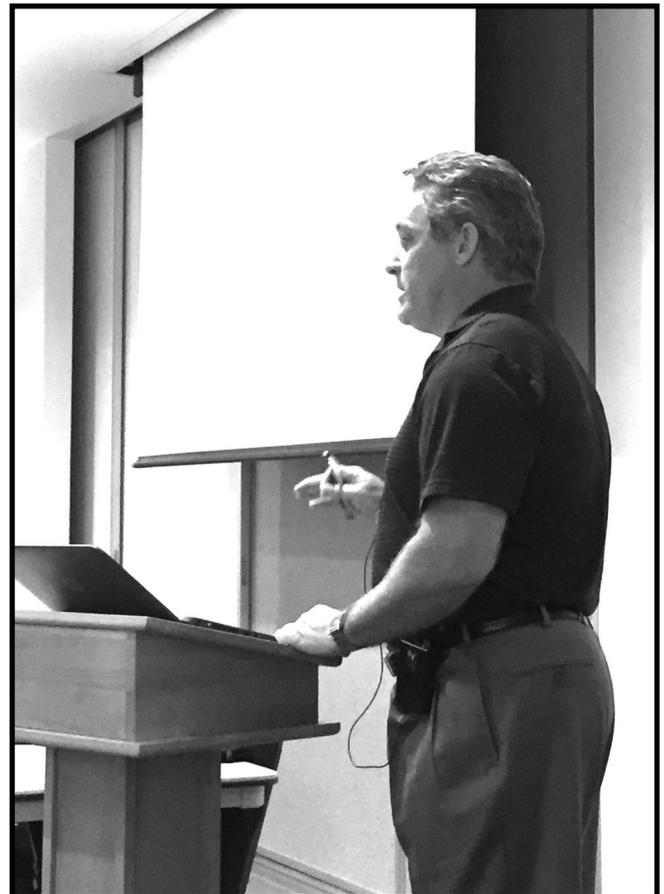
Her tenacious spirit should surely motivate us all. Every movement needs a champion, and Janice is truly ours. (Not to short credit to Nancy Forster, who is right up there with her.) One of the most memorable moments had to be when one participant gave voice to the unofficial conference battle cry, “Sic ‘em, Janice!”

Thanks and commendations go to all who labored to provide this opportunity: Larry, Dolly, Brenda, and the whole conference planning team for the best RSOL National Conference yet. Thanks also to Mary Sue and Texas Voices for so graciously and ably hosting the event. From the poignant stories of injustice to the fun of the auction and to Janice’s inspirational closing remarks, it was an event to be remembered. Sign me up for next year!

So What About Next Year?

We do not have a date and location for next year’s conference, though our default will be to come back to Dallas. There are strong arguments and incentives both for staying and for moving around the country. There are also a number of obstacles to moving elsewhere; the two primary ones being budget and sufficient local support. Our financial challenges involve minimizing venue, food and A/V costs, so if you have a lead, we’d like to hear about it!

If you think we can come to YOUR state and can show us it can be done on an almost-shoestring budget with people you know there as “ground crew,” please contact Dolley at ohiorsol@yahoo.com ASAP.



Paul Rigney discusses the challenges of international travel.

A "Dream" Conference

By Steven Yoder

If the contest to pass saner sex offender laws in America is a marathon and not a sprint, then this year's largest-ever Reform Sex Offender Laws conference was a significant mile marker. Attorneys, researchers, family members, and registered citizens spent 2½ days sharing statistics and research results, telling stories, and brainstorming and debating strategies for upending our country's cruel and ineffective sex crime policies.

The stakes are as high as ever. As board chair Paul Shannon put it in opening remarks, "This war [on registered citizens] is undermining the possibility of community and redemption in our country. It's not only our lives that are at stake--it's the future of our country and the kind of society we want to live in."

Some of the highlights of the conference were: Attorney Jeffrey Gamso, assistant public defender for Ohio's Cuyahoga County, walked listeners through significant court decisions in that state, including an important 2005 ruling that for the first time acknowledged that registration is punishment, not simply a neutral regulatory scheme; Paul Shannon led a brainstorming session about a national project designed to end public registries; Emily Horowitz, a professor at St. Francis College and author of a brand-new book addressing the context for current sex offender policies, presented stories, research, and statistics challenging the effectiveness of sex offender laws, and Janice Bellucci discussed her successful campaign to virtually rid California of presence restrictions.

She concluded the conference with her version of Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech. "I have a dream," Bellucci read, "that one day in America, registered citizens will live in a nation where they will not be judged by a mistake they

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About 2015 Conference Videos

Our LIVE STREAM was a success, but is now closed, since obviously the event is over. Our videographer is busily editing and uploading all the sessions, and setting access codes. All our live streamed sessions are up and available at rsolconference.org/conference-videos/2015-videos.

There will be a small charge of \$30 for 45 days access for those wishing to view for the first time – both as a full "package" or as individual sessions. All existing attendees and streamers received 45 days' access to these recordings at no additional charge.

We had to make this switch to paid views in order to cover the cost of producing and hosting the videos on a special server; this is not intended to be a revenue stream. If we get enough demand, we will lower the price in the future.

made decades ago but by the content of their current character and actions.... How do we get there? By showing up, standing up, and speaking up."

It was a spirited charge to a reform movement that's up against laws every bit as vicious as those legalizing Jim Crow and court rulings that are the equal of the cold-blooded 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson decision that upheld the separation of the races. But today the movement has left the Birmingham jail and is confronting the infrastructure of injustice in state capitals, courtrooms, and the streets.



Live-streaming the Conference

By Sandy Rozek

I had very much hoped to attend this year's conference, but the closer the date came, the more I knew it wasn't going to happen. By then we had decided to have the live stream option available, and while that didn't replace so much about the conference--seeing my friends, meeting new people, enjoying the fellowship--it allowed me to participate in the awesome presentations by our incredible lineup of professionals. I missed a couple due to some conflicts, but I can still see them now and anytime during the next month. In addition, I can see the all of the workshops.

Is live stream as good as being there? No way. But is it better than missing the RSOL Conference totally? Absolutely.



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