

New Orleans
CITY BUSINESS

2008

LEADERSHIP
in
LAW

Honoring 50 outstanding lawyers



John Houghtaling

Position: managing partner, Gauthier, Houghtaling and Williams

Age: 36

Family: wife, Brittany

Education: bachelor's degree, Emory University; juris doctor, Loyola University School of Law

John Houghtaling had a busy 2007, which is spilling into 2008 as he remains involved with Hurricane Katrina-related litigation. Houghtaling is co-lead counsel for three major lawsuits stemming from Katrina, and the Louisiana Attorney General's Office asked him to represent the state in the suits, all of which involve myriad insurance issues related to Katrina.

Among the three is *Joseph Sher v. Lafayette Insurance Co., et al.* This precedent-setting case, now pending before the Louisiana Supreme Court, involves the wind versus flood policy exclusions that many insurance companies are trying to use against policyholders. Houghtaling said the Louisiana Fourth Circuit Court of Appeal recently issued a favorable ruling for coverage, and the case will affect hundreds of thousands of Louisiana homeowners.

Along with the insurance fight, Houghtaling also has provided legal representation to hundreds of storm victims. Since the Aug. 29, 2007, deadline to file claims, Houghtaling has been counsel to more than 1,500 homeowners and property and business owners involved in Katrina-related claims, winning \$55 million in settlements for his clients since the storm.

Houghtaling is just as active in the community as he is in the courtroom and has undertaken many civic projects in the past year.

Houghtaling served as fundraising chairman for Archbishop Alfred Hughes' Community Appeal for 2007, which benefits Catholic Charities and other nonprofits.

In December, with the help of the Ferrari Club of Louisiana, Houghtaling led a shopping spree at Toys 'R' Us for Children's Hospital patients. Club members pur-

chased \$10,000 worth of toys then delivered them to the patients. Houghtaling also sponsored a toy giveaway for Destiny's Children, a nonprofit that helps more than 100 inner-city kids.

Also in 2007, as part of his work on the annual French Quarter Classic, Houghtaling spearheaded a meeting in New Orleans of exotic car collectors from around the country, providing an economic boost to the French Quarter. The group also raised \$15,000 for the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

Houghtaling also has supported scholarships and funding for The Good Shepard School, a donor-supported school that provides education to at-risk, inner-city children, and Loyola University School of Law for a new career services office. •

— Robin Shannon

James Williams

Position: partner, Gauthier, Houghtaling & Williams

Age: 34

Family: wife, Elizabeth; and children, Jordon, 4, Kendall, 21 months

Education: bachelor's degree, Louisiana State University; juris doctor, Washington and Lee University School of Law

One of James Williams' most satisfying cases came last fall.

Williams argued for the state attorney general's office on behalf of Louisiana citizens that flood exclusions in homeowners' policies were ambiguous, prompting a Fourth Circuit Court of Appeal decision saying such rising water damage was covered.

"I think that I am most proud of that case because the result ended up being so important to so many people around here," Williams said. "You can't help but feel good when something like that happens."

Williams is a partner at Gauthier, Houghtaling & Williams, where he has specialized in civil litigation with a particular focus on business and catastrophic personal injury litigation.

His work in winning a \$1.5-million recovery for an injured railroad worker won national publicity. In 2006 Williams won a \$1.7-million award for a child injured as a result of a defectively assembled bicycle.

When offered a chance to become involved at Good Shepherd School in downtown New Orleans, he jumped at the opportunity.

"Because both of my parents are public school educators, I have been aware of the disparity between public and private education in our city for a long time. I was very happy to do what I could to help the school because it offers a kind of program that holds out great promise for the kids of New Orleans."

That program offers a tuition-free education in a private school setting to at-risk city students whose families live below the federal poverty line.

"The idea is to create the kind of safe environment, combined with teaching excellence that you would see at any other private school in the city, with the only difference being that it is open to students who would probably never otherwise be in a school like that," said Williams, who serves on the school's board of directors.

Williams has taken special pride in seeing the school, which opened in 2001, gradually rebuild its enrollment after Katrina forced many of its students to leave the city. This spring the school will graduate its first full class.

Williams' commitment to helping the youth of New Orleans also includes his time as a Little League basketball coach and as a Sunday School teacher.

"I think that if you really want to make a difference you have to get involved no matter how much time or energy it takes."•

— Garry Boulard

