

YLS In brief

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Arkansas Law Blogging: You Can Do It Even If You Just Crawled Out From Under A Rock

by Christian Harris

Unless you have been living under a rock for the past ten years, you know what a “blog” is. Blogs are fundamentally transforming news reporting, citizen journalism, and idea dissemination. Legal “blawgs” have had a similar, though not as high-profile, effect on law practice, law firm marketing, and legal scholarship. Strangely, however, there are very few blawgs in Arkansas. This column is going to bring you up to speed on the blawg landscape in Arkansas—we’ll cover the basics for those of you who have just emerged from your cave, and then cover Arkansas. There are so few Arkansas blawgs that it is possible to list all of them in this column; we will do that, and finally suggest that you, as a Young Lawyer, should start your own legal blog.

The Basics

First, for those of you who have just crawled out from under the rock (or just finished studying for the bar exam): welcome to the twenty-first century! Someone else will have to explain about cell phones, but to understand blogs you need to know about this magical device called the Internet: go turn your computer on and come back in a couple hours after you’ve explored a bit. Ready? Good.

The term “blog” is short for “weblog,” which, in turn, is a log, or journal, of text, images, sound, and video that one makes available to anyone else on the Internet to read. Although the infrastructure to support a blog has existed since the mid-1990’s, blogs became extremely popular in the very early part of the twenty-first century. A blog can be updated as often as you want, can have as many authors as you want, and can be as personal or professional as you want. There are tens of thousands of blogs in existence (collectively called the “blogosphere”); some are established institutions by now while others come into existence and wink out again according to the author’s mood. Blogs are a tremendously powerful tool for collaboration, communication, and free speech. They are the realization of the citizen-owned printing press. In the political and news blogs arena, for example, blogs have been responsible for, among other things, breaking the U.S. Attorney scandal (www.talkingpointsmemo.com) and

getting Dan Rather kicked off 60 Minutes (www.powerline.com).

A “blawg” is simply a blog devoted to a legal topic (although you don’t have to use that term, it’s become somewhat passe.). There are thousands of legal blogs; a good place to start your exploration of them is the American Bar Association’s Blawg directory. It lists over 200 blawgs covering topics from Administrative Law to Worker’s Compensation. Quintessential examples of established legal blogs are Howard Bashman’s How Appealing (<http://howappealing.law.com/>), the SCOTUS Blog (<http://www.scotusblog.com/wp/>), and the Volokh Conspiracy (<http://volokh.com/>).

The Arkansas Blawgosphere

There are very few blawgs in Arkansas. Here are the blogs listed under “Arkansas” in the ABA legal directory, and a few more that we think are important. The ABA-listed blawgs are:

- Legendary Arkansas criminal defense lawyer John Wesley Hall, Jr. gives spirited coverage on all areas of criminal defense law on his blog, (<http://www.lawofcriminaldefense.com/blog/>). Mr. Hall’s blog is an adjunct to his treatise Professional Responsibility in Criminal Defense Practice.

- Kevin Hickey, a Fort Smith lawyer, writes about family law and civil litigation on his blog (<http://www.kevinhickeylaw.com/blog/>) in an informal but thorough style.

- Justin Eisele’s “Arkansas Criminal Defense Blog” (<http://eiselelaw.com/blog/>) seems to be mostly oriented toward members of the public and is written in a very accessible style. In recent posts, for example, Mr. Eisele has described the bail bond system in Arkansas, and given an overview of asset forfeiture.

- On the Arkansas Business Litigation Blog (www.arbusinesslitigation-blog.com)—unquestionably the finest legal weblog in Arkansas—the authors cover all business litigation cases issued by the Arkansas appellate courts. But there is so much more! Kevin Lemley covers an entire blog’s worth of Eighth Circuit intellectual property decisions. Christian Harris covers appellate practice decisions. (Full disclosure: the author is one of

the maintainers of the Arkansas Business Litigation Blog.)

There are several other Arkansas blogs that touch on legal issues from time to time. Dean Cynthia Nance describes the goings-on at her law school at the University of Arkansas Law School Blog (<http://blog.law.uark.edu/>). The blog for the UALR William H. Bowen School of Law in Little Rock (<http://bowenadmissions.blogspot.com>) is maintained by that school's Assistant Dean for Admissions, and covers topics relevant to those seeking to be admitted to that school, as well as general information for students seeking admission to any law school. The Arkansas Times blog (<http://www.arktimes.com/blogs/arkansasblog/>) gives Max Brantley's perspective on all things Arkansas, including legal matters; Pat Lynch's blog, Lynch at Large (<http://lynchatlarge.wordpress.com/>), covers big cases, and the blog block at Arkansas Business covers all manner of Arkansas business news. State Representative Steve Harrelson's blog, Under the Dome (<http://www.underthedome.com/>), is especially useful when the Arkansas legislature is in session. And if you are into politics, you could do a lot worse than to follow Blake Rutherford's blog, the Think Tank (<http://www.blakesthinktank.com/>).

Who Cares About All This Blog Business?

You should, especially if you are a Young Lawyer. The main reason that you should keep up with blogs—both the contents of the important ones, and the phenomenon of the blog itself—is that the blog isn't going anywhere, at least as long as there is an Internet. Blogs are a standard method of communication and collaboration in our modern, twenty-first century world. Blawgs, in our opinion, will be no less a force in the legal profession. We think they will eventually be a standard-issue way of disseminating and communicating legal knowledge and expertise throughout the twenty-first century. So, if you are a lawyer, you should keep up with them.

But it makes particular sense as a Young Lawyer to write your own blog. There are several reasons why a blog is a beneficial activity for a newly-minted attorney. For example, consider a simple blog where you read cases in your area of interest, and summarize them and offer commentary on a blog. As a Young Lawyer, a blog would:

Help you learn the law. If you are a litigator—civil or criminal—keeping abreast of the developments in case law is one of your basic

professional obligations. It is particularly important for new litigators. As the curmudgeon says,

[Y]ou have one main job as a beginning associate: Be a sponge; soak up the law. You will have only a scant year or two when you have the luxury (though it may feel like a curse) of time—time to read many cases closely. This is your short opportunity to learn the law.

Mark Herrmann, *The Curmudgeon's Guide to Practicing Law 23* (ABA Publishing 2006). It is one obligation, unfortunately, that is very easy to let slide. A blog will help you read the cases and keep up.

Make you known to your colleagues, local and otherwise. As a young lawyer, your typical legal work product has a limited audience: it may be the partners at your firm, who function as your first "clients," or your supervisors in government practice, or a judge. A blog makes your written work product available to the entire world. (A corollary: if you are one of the many young lawyers who changes firms or positions in the first few years of law practice, you'll have a wealth of writing samples available.)

Build a client base. It's not just lawyers who read blawgs. In-house counsel, regular folks, and potential clients read them too. This is especially true given the dearth of blawgs in Arkansas. Think of any topic—family law, worker's compensation, transactions, consumer protection, education, and environmental law immediately leap to mind—and there is a vacuum in Arkansas, in this new, important form of communication. You can get in on the ground floor. And it's easy—head over to Blogger (www.blogger.com) or WordPress (www.wordpress.com) and you can be up and running in less than an hour.

Conclusion

The tiny blawgosphere in Arkansas is underdeveloped. Opportunities abound for a new generation of Young Lawyers to take control of their own citizen printing presses and begin covering, and commenting, on the development of the law in Arkansas. You should join in—it's much better out here than in the cave!

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Hats Off

After completing a clerkship in the chambers of Chief U.S. Bankruptcy Court Judge Audrey R. Evans, **Lyndsey D. Dilks** recently joined the Dickerson Law Firm, P.A., where she practices bankruptcy law.

Taura McDaniel was recently appointed by the Central Democratic Committee to the Craighead County Election Commission.

Colleen E. McCullough, an attorney with Sirote & Permutt, P.C. in Birmingham, Alabama, was recently elected to serve a one-year term on the Executive Committee of the Birmingham Bar's Young Lawyers Section.

Kristin L. Pawlik has recently been named a partner in Keith, Miller, Butler & Webb, PLLC in Rogers, Arkansas. Her practice areas include Employment Law, Domestic Relations, Criminal Defense and Immigration Compliance.

Dan Marvin and his wife are expecting a child on July 28, 2008.

As of January 1, 2008, **J.R. Carroll** is a partner with Davis, Wright, Clark, Butt & Carithers, PLC in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

Courtney Salas-Ford recently started her own business--Ford Legal Outsourcing--a legal outsourcing firm. Her firm offers services such as drafting trial-level motions and briefs, appellate briefs, and conducting

legal research for Arkansas attorneys.

Perry Wilson was named a Director at the Barber Law Firm in January of 2008.

Robyn P. Allmendinger and **B.J. Walker** made partner at the Rose Law Firm in February of 2008.

Jamaal Walker and **Tracye I. Walker** welcomed twin girls—Nijah Jai and Nadia Camille—into their family on October 29, 2007.

Alice Eastwood is expecting a baby boy in May 2008.

In Memoriam

Jon Warren Coleman

Jon W. Coleman, age 32, of Jonesboro, died January 20, 2008 at his home of natural causes. A native and life-long resident of Jonesboro, Jon was an attorney in Jonesboro. He was a graduate of Crowley's Ridge Academy, the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, and the University of Arkansas School of Law in Fayetteville.

IF YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION ON YLS MEMBERS WHO DESERVE A "HATS OFF" OR WOULD LIKE TO SUBMIT IDEAS FOR ARTICLE PUBLICATION PLEASE CONTACT THE EDITOR OF "IN BRIEF", TASHA SOSSAMON TAYLOR, tcsossamon@yahoo.com or ASSISTANT EDITOR: VICKI S. VASSER, vm@mcrmt.com