

# feature



## Promoting Jury Appreciation Week

By: Judge Eddie Northcutt<sup>1</sup>

**S**erving on a jury — few understand the fundamental importance of jury service more than trial judges and appellate justices. But, how well do we communicate the significance or express our appreciation for those who are answering the summons to serve?

With “Jury Appreciation Week” having just passed, now is a good time to remind ourselves the importance of thanking the citizens who serve, so that if you hadn’t given it proper due this year, plans can be made for next year.

As the Texas Uniform Jury Handbook states, “The United States Constitution and the Texas Constitution guarantee all people, regardless of race, religion, sex, national origin, or economic status, the right to trial by an impartial jury. Justice ultimately depends to a large measure upon the quality of the jurors who serve in our courts.”<sup>2</sup> When members of the venire leave the courthouse, are we adequately helping them understand the importance and solemnity of the judicial proceedings in which they participated?

In 2015, the Texas Legislature passed a bill creating “Jury Appreciation Week” to be celebrated the first week of May. The bill’s author, Sen. Royce West, filed this statement of intent with the bill:

The fundamental importance of a trial by jury in our system of justice is demonstrated by its enshrinement in the 6th and 7th Amendments to the Constitution of the United States, along with Article I of the Constitution of Texas, our state bill of rights. The work of juries is extremely important to the function of our democracy and without it many of the liberties and freedoms we have as a society could be in jeopardy. To serve on a jury is to serve one of the most important civic duties in both our state and our nation. A juror’s work is an often tough, tiring, and thankless job. However, without it, one of the foundations of our democracy, the judicial system that ensures a safe and free society, would crumble. The first week in May is designated as Jury Appreciation Week to express to those who have served or are currently serving on juries of all kinds that their work is noted and appreciated.<sup>3</sup>

The statute states, “The first seven days in May are Jury Appreciation Week in recognition of the outstanding and important contributions made by Texas citizens who serve as jurors.”<sup>4</sup>

The week corresponds with Law Day on May 1<sup>st</sup>, proclaimed by President Eisenhower, and later codified as a special day of celebration by the people of the United States in appreciation of their liberties and ideals of

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equality and justice under law and for the cultivation of the respect for law that is so vital to the democratic way of life.

Jury Appreciation Week is dedicated to honoring those citizens who give of their time to participate in the judicial system. And, although Jury Appreciation Week is designated to occur during the first week in May, it can be scheduled during any week that jurors are empaneled, as not every county tries a case to a jury during the month of May, much less the first week. The important thing is to make an effort to be intentional in expressing appreciation for our citizens' participation in the judicial branch of government.

This year was the second year of this effort to celebrate the jurors for their service. The primary effort thus far has been two-fold: (1) communicating with county and district clerks about the week, providing them with toolkits containing resources that will aid them in promoting the week, and (2) providing information and resources on the State Bar of Texas' Jury Service Committee website. The website has many resources for judges, including a sample "thank you" letter to send to jurors selected for service on a jury.

The State Bar of Texas Jury Service Committee is dedicated to developing and implementing programs to ensure broad citizen participation and support of jury service. Visit the Committee's website for additional resources, including public service announcements, educational pamphlets, and articles of interest. Links to all of the Jury Service Committee resources are available [here](#).

Judges are, among other things, leaders. Leadership in promoting the effort to raise awareness, provide information, and express appreciation for our jurors can, and should, start with the judges who summon jurors for service. We can work in collaboration with our clerks and local bar associations to formulate plans that work well for the courts we serve.

By small, intentional, consistent acts of appreciation, jurors will better understand their critical role in our system of justice and truly feel our gratitude.

*(Endnotes)*

1. Judge Northcutt serves as the judge of the 8<sup>th</sup> Judicial District and has recently started his second term.
2. [https://www.texasbar.com/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Jury\\_Information&Template=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=23435](https://www.texasbar.com/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Jury_Information&Template=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=23435).
3. <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/tlodocs/84R/analysis/pdf/SB00565F.pdf#navpanes=0>
4. Tex. Gov't Code § 662.155 (West 2015).