



ORLEANS PUBLIC DEFENDERS

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OPD HONORS 2014 “CLYDE MERRITT AWARD” RECIPIENTS
Emily Beasley and Nicole Heisser First Investigators Recognized

New Orleans – The Orleans Public Defenders (OPD) recently honored Emily Beasley and Nicole Heisser as the 2014 recipients of the “Clyde Merritt Award,” recognizing their extraordinary dedication to public defense. Together, the two investigators have changed the face of investigative work in the New Orleans criminal justice system, most notably for public defense.

Beasley’s investigative career began straight out of Tulane University when she joined OPD during the transition to an emerging system for public defense. Often faced with incredulity for the work being done, Beasley and her fellow investigators doggedly took on the injustices faced by indigent defendants. Beasley’s commitment to justice continues today as she fights for indigent clients in federal court.

2014 marked Heisser’s 20th year working on behalf of indigent defendants, first at the Louisiana Capital Assistance Center and then OPD. Heisser worked closely with Clyde Merritt and she, along with fellow recipient Beasley and Ben Sullivan, were part of a revolutionary crew of investigators that actively and zealously investigated cases in search of the facts and stories for each client’s case. Heisser leads a team of 12 investigators as OPD’s Supervising Investigator.

Chief Defender Derwyn Bunton presented the awards during the launch party for the newly created Ben Sullivan Investigator Fellowship. Established in the memory of Ben and his incredible passion and dedication for public defense, the fellowship follows Ben’s investigative career at OPD. Ben devoted himself to those in need, sought the truth and endlessly fought for justice. Launching later this year, with a focus on applicants committed to representing the most disenfranchised, the Ben Sullivan Investigator fellowship will be an integral part in fulfilling OPD’s mission to provide zealous, client-centered representation.

Established in 2012 to honor one of the stalwart advocates for public defense, Clyde Merritt, the Clyde Merritt Award recognizes commitment and fight for the cause of public defense in New Orleans.

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