

AYLA PRESIDENT'S COLUMN



AUSTIN KAPLAN
KAPLAN LAW FIRM

Interview with Austin Kaplan

AYLA welcomes Austin Kaplan as president of the organization for the 2017-18 bar year.

AYLA: Let's start with everyone's favorite question: Would you tell us a little about yourself?

KAPLAN: I'm just a cave-man. I fell in some ice, and later got thawed out by scientists.

There are many things I don't know. But there is one thing I do know: we have the country's best legal community right here in Austin. This didn't happen by luck or chance. It was thanks to the hard work and great example set by our bar leaders—folks like Adam Schramek, David Courreges, Amanda Arriaga, Chari Kelly, Katie Fillmore, and Drew Harris. I see my job as preserving, and if I'm lucky, furthering their excellent work.

In my spare time, I'm a plaintiff's employment and civil rights lawyer, handling anything an individual might need in the workplace: negotiating things like disability leave, pregnancy accommodation, and severance agreements, and handling litigation regarding unpaid overtime, commissions, non-competes, whistleblowers, and wrongful termination.

I served for four years as

chairperson of the City of Austin's Ethics Commission, and currently serve on the board of the Austin Anti-Defamation League where my focus is civil rights. In 2015, I represented marriage equality clients who successfully sued a county clerk to get their marriage license, and in 2016 I was honored to be named Austinite of the Year at the Austin Under 40 Awards.

AYLA: What are some of your Austin-area favorites?

KAPLAN: Food: Tacodeli's famous Salsa Doña. I could eat it all day. Drinks: Bouldin Creek Cafe; Once Over Coffee Bar; SquareRut Kava Bar. These are my unofficial office locations. Fun: Barton Springs; Big Stacy; beach volleyball at Zilker Park; Dragonboat on Town Lake.

(Dragonboat, for the uninitiated, is a large, canoe-like boat that looks like a dragon.)

AYLA: Why did you first get involved with AYLAs?

KAPLAN: Networking. I went to law school in Illinois. It turns out Illinois is not Texas. When I got to Texas (as soon as I could), I knew two lawyers total. I needed help. I needed a community. AYLAs provided it. I could meet young lawyers in town, hunt for jobs, celebrate, and commiserate. Most of whatever success I've had is thanks to AYLAs and the great people I've met through it.

AYLA: What are your goals for AYLAs this year?

KAPLAN: Openness: to share more of what we do and how we do it with you;

Visibility: to share more of

what we do, and why we do it, and who we're doing it for, with the greater ATX community; and

Stewardship: continue AYLAs membership growth, ensure its financial independence, continue the award-winning programming, and try some fun new things along the way.

AYLA: What do you think are the biggest challenges facing today's young lawyers in Austin?

KAPLAN: Jobs. It's still jobs. It'll probably always be jobs. I joke that UT Law graduates around 400 lawyers each year who all want to stay, but are forced to take higher-paying jobs in Dallas and Houston. But, if I can manage to find my way here, you can too. I'm happy to share my playbook with you at the next Docket Call, and I bet most other folks are as well.

AYLA: If you could impart

one piece of wisdom on the first-year lawyer and make it stick, what would it be?

KAPLAN: Ask too many questions. Looking back, I knew basically nothing as a first-year lawyer, and was hesitant to ask basic questions. That's a basic approach. Better to ask a basic question than make a basic mistake! Don't be basic.

AYLA: What has been your most rewarding AYLAs experience so far?

KAPLAN: Delivering holiday gifts to needy families. It's so heartwarming for us and them. And it helps chip away at some of the negative stereotypes against lawyers.

AYLA: What is an interesting fact about you that people probably don't know?

KAPLAN: I was once a professional live-band karaoke host. **AL**

UPCOMING EVENTS

THURSDAY, JULY 20

AYLAs Member Docket Call

5:30 – 7 p.m.

FirmSpace, 500 W. 2nd St., 14th Floor Balcony

FREE for AYLAs members; new members RSVP online or at the door.

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THURSDAY, AUGUST 17

AYLAs Member Docket Call

5:30 – 7 p.m.

Location TBD

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