



The volunteers and organizers behind A Simple Thread, a charity that helps Houston's homeless population, including Jacquie Brennan (second row, right), Cathy Herrington (front row, second from right), and Jan Whaley (back row, second from right)

Inspiration can strike in the unlikelyst of places. For **Jacquie Brennan**, it was the first chapter of John Grisham's *The Street Lawyer*. The novel opens with a homeless man taking hostage a group of lawyers at a powerhouse law firm. He asks them, "What have you actually done for people?"

The question resonated with Brennan, an attorney with the Southwest ADA Center in Houston and director of the Paralegal Certification Program at the University of Houston. "It got me to thinking. I'm not a fundraiser, so what's something small I can do to help people?"

A Simple Thread was the result. Brennan founded the non-profit organization in the summer of 2008 with the help of her husband and friends to provide care packages for Houston's homeless population. Brennan credits the quick response from her friends for getting the organization up and running.

"They have helped make it happen," said Brennan, who serves as president of the board of directors. Her friends who jumped to volunteer make up the rest of the board, among them fellow Houston attorneys **Cathy Herrington** of the Herrington Law Firm, P.C. and **Kevin Connelly** of Baker Botts, L.L.P., as well as paralegals Kay Haggard of Patterson & Sheridan, L.L.P. and Jan Whaley of Hughes, Watters, Askanase, L.L.P.

The board members have provided the majority of the donations for the care packages or kits. "We haven't had any fundraisers. We've just asked friends and family. And we've gotten support from lawyers and others who have made dona-

tions," Brennan said. One-hundred percent of public donations go directly to the kits. Board members cover administrative costs.

Depending on the amount of available items, the group prepares anywhere from 40 to 100 kits every few weeks. The packages are organized by themes, including kits for personal hygiene, first aid, tooth care, and skin care, as well as packages to provide protection from the elements and packages for children. Each kit includes a referral sheet for resources and services to help the homeless.

In its first four months, the group delivered more than 1,000 kits. As of early February, that number had increased to nearly 1,700.

"I had no idea how much we would do," Brennan said. "The first time we were delivering kits, as we put them in my car, I realized that I didn't know who was homeless or where to go. I also didn't realize how many children there would be. It's heart-rending."

Brennan said people were worried about her going out to distribute kits but that she's never felt scared. "People are so grateful. It's constant 'Thank you.' They appreciate these little kits because they include things they normally can't get. Simple things to us, like cough drops or vitamins.

"I'm not trying to solve the big problem," she added. "I'm just trying to make things a little easier for some people."

For more information about A Simple Thread, visit [www.asimplethread.org](http://www.asimplethread.org). ☆



About six times a year, **Maris Blair** needs a little R&R. So she loads up her car and drives around the country. When she finally comes to a stop, it's only to unload her dragster and speed down a raceway at 170 to 175 miles per hour. That's when the real relaxation begins. "When you get in the car, all you are aware of is the car and the track. You black out everything else. You are in your own little world," Blair says. "You forget about work. You forget about personal issues. That's one of the things about racing that is nice."

Blair, an attorney with Lineberger, Goggan, Blair & Sampson, L.L.P. in Houston, races in Super Comp and Top Dragster class (there are many other sportsman and professional classes) around Texas, Colorado, Kansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Tennessee. For someone who did not know how to change her car's oil, Blair has come a long way since she first started drag racing 13 years ago. She now talks about car maintenance, engines, chassis, and throttle like those terms are part of every person's vocabulary. She's also part of two teams: Sullivan Motorsports from Dallas and Sunset Racecraft from Lubbock. Five years after her ex-husband introduced her to racing, she won a Wally. "I was racing all day in the heat, so I was exhausted," she says of the win.

"But I was also extremely excited. It was such an accomplishment." Blair says win or not, she still feels a sense of accomplishment. "Some racers may disagree, but I feel every step of the way is an accomplishment."

One of the things that drew Blair to drag racing was that it is not simply about who reaches the finish line first. "It's very challenging. This is a thinking man's sport," she says. "It's not about being the fastest. It's about being the most consistent. It's a continuous challenge." Super comp racers win by racing their cars one-quarter of a mile in 8.90 seconds. The racer with the time closest to 8.90 is the winner. So, a driver could barrel past the finish line in 8.88 seconds, but would still lose if his or her opponent gets there in 8.91 seconds.

Traveling around the country with many of the racers creates a strong bond, Blair says. So, there is no real mean-spirited competition. "[The racers] are another family to me. They've seen me at my best, and they've seen me at my worst."

While the sport is exhilarating, Blair understands the risks that come with racing. People often ask her if she has pondered the sport's ever-present dangers. Blair deflects the question with humor: "It's dangerous driving down I-35 every day." ❖

## TEXAS PEOPLE

The Dallas Bar Association honored Justice **Carolyn Wright**, of the 5th District Court of Appeals, with its Martin Luther King, Jr. Justice Award. Wright was honored for the example she has set through her professional and personal accomplishments.



**Craig Lewis**, of the Lewis Law Firm in Houston, was sworn in as president-elect of the American Board of Trial Advocates. Lewis, who served as vice president of the organization in 2008, will serve as president of the organization in 2010.



**Elizabeth Copeland**, a shareholder in Oppenheimer, Blend, Harrison & Tate, Inc. in San Antonio, received the Janet Spragens Pro Bono Award from the American Bar Association Section of Taxation. Copeland was honored for her commitment to pro bono services in the area of federal and state tax law.



Former State Bar President **James B. Sales**, of Houston, received the 2009 Outstanding Service Award from the Fellows of the American Bar Foundation. Sales was commended in part for his service as chair of the Texas Access to Justice Commission. The award was presented at the Fellows' 53rd Annual Awards Reception and Banquet during the American Bar Association Midyear Meeting in February in Boston.

