

September 15, 2006 – Florida Bar News

Katrina survivor awaits swearing in as Florida Bar member

Family's New Orleans home still uninhabitable

Louisiana native Shaddrick Haston, a lawyer in the Orange/Osceola Public Defender's Office, recently observed the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina while waiting to be sworn in as a member of The Florida Bar. It was never in Haston's plans to be a Florida lawyer, but Katrina changed all that.

In the summer of 2005, the recent law school graduate moved into his family's New Orleans home to begin a law clerk's position with a Houma, Louisiana, lawyer. Several weeks later, Hurricane Katrina sent the Haston family packing to a Mobile, Alabama, hotel wondering what had become of their home. Three weeks later, the Hastons found their east New Orleans home still under four feet of water.

With no home, no job, and thousands of dollars in law school loans looming, Haston sought refuge in Florida.

"A friend had moved to Gainesville and invited me to stay while I sent out resumes," Haston said. "She explained that I could practice in Florida with a Louisiana Bar license. It sounded like a good — and maybe my only — option."

Little did Haston know that finding out if he passed the Louisiana bar exam would be a maelstrom unto itself. A portion of his exam was ruined in the Katrina flooding. He did pass the Louisiana bar and has since passed the Florida bar exam.

When the job offer came from the Public Defender's Office, he thought it was a good fit.

"I wanted to be in a larger city where I was more likely to get more trial experience faster," Haston said. "I've been trying batteries, assaults, and misdemeanors, but I was able to sit in on a first degree murder case soon after joining the office."

Orange/Osceola Public Defender Bob Wesley says the displaced would-be civil lawyer is fitting in with criminal defense work.

"Shad has six years of military experience and is extremely flexible and resourceful," Wesley said. "Despite all the personal turmoil Katrina caused, Shad jumped right into work here and fit in great. New Orleans' loss is our gain."

Haston's family owned rental property in Houma and moved there after the storm. The status of their New Orleans property is unresolved, being in an area that is still uninhabitable. He says the legal wrangling with the insurance company has started.

"My family keeps calling me for legal advice, but I have to explain that I don't practice that kind of law," Haston said. "I tell them if they broke into a house or held up a gas station I could help them. My folks wondered why they sent me to law school."

[Updated: 09-11-2006]