



Polk County District Attorney Lee Hon Named Outstanding Partner in Courage by Child Advocacy Center of Texas

There comes a time in any prosecutor's life, when what should have happened, did not happen, when justice is not served. In Lee Hon's practice, that time came in 2004 in the case of Anthony Boone. A four-year-old little boy is murdered and his body is wrapped in a blue blanket and put in a shallow grave. Lime is sprinkled over the remains and for four months no one discovers the body. After the body is uncovered, there's a trial. No one is convicted of the murder. Two people confess to "tampering with evidence". The evidence: the little boy's decomposed body. The maximum penalty: ten years in prison. Then Assistant District Attorney, Lee Hon, was frustrated with the law. Why wasn't there any more of a penalty for tampering with this little boy's body? What could he do? Although many others might have shrugged their shoulders and moved on, Lee Hon did not let that be the end of it. Lee lobbied hard to make sure that "tampering with the body" had a stiffer penalty. Largely because of his efforts, the legislature changed the law. Today the penalty is 20 years, twice what it used to be.

After that verdict, Lee made it his mission to protect children. In 2007 when he became Polk County District Attorney, Lee prioritized the cases so that violence against children would be central. Not only did he work with law enforcement in this effort, but he also lobbied the Memorial Medical Center Hospital of Livingston to create a Sexual Assault Response Team (SART). Lee was then instrumental in the creation of the Sexual Assault Nurse Examination (SANE) center in the hospital. By 2009, Lee determined that Polk County needed a Child Advocacy Center, so that no child would "fall through the cracks", so that there would never be another Anthony Boone tragedy. With the help of his right-hand person, Sherry Sprayberry, he assisted in establishing Childrenz Haven. He worked closely with the first Executive Director and helped in the drafting of Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation. Lee helped Childrenz Haven grow. He lobbied the county for space in a county building. He lobbied for office furniture as

well as much-needed video equipment. He made sure Childrenz Haven had the facility and equipment it needed and that the staff was adequately trained.

In May 2011, Lee Hon joined forces with Legislator John Otto, and Joy Rauls, the head of Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas (CACTX), and several others in an effort to craft legislation that would protect child forensic videos from disclosure to criminal defendants. In particular, Lee helped write the legislation that was eventually passed by the Texas Legislature. He also spoke to the bill's sponsors and other legislators to ensure the passage of the bill. As money has gotten tighter, he has also lobbied key legislators, including John Otto, to ensure that CAC's will continue to be funded.

As an undergraduate at Sam Houston State University, William Lee Hon had only one goal: to join law enforcement and, especially, to become a member of the Texas Department of Public Safety. But jobs were tight when Lee graduated in 1987 from the College of Criminal Justice, so he decided to go to law school instead. He attended the University of Mississippi School Of Law and received his Doctor of Jurisprudence in 1990. After a few years in private practice and at the Texas Attorney General's Civil Rights Division, Lee returned to Polk County as an assistant felony prosecutor in 1996.

This last year, Lee helped Childrenz Haven select a new Executive Director and forensic interviewer. He helped the center host its first-ever Gala where there was a standing room only crowd. In March, his office sponsored its fourth annual 5K/10K Run for Victims with half the proceeds going to Childrenz Haven and half to the domestic violence center, Saafehouse. Throughout this period he has been crucial to the success of Childrenz Haven offering advice to the staff and the Board whenever needed.

He has also continued to prosecute crimes against children, continuing to make them a priority in his office. As a result, forensic interviews have increased from an average of five a month in FY2011 to nine per month in FY2012, thanks largely to his efforts to prioritize child abuse crimes for law enforcement and for prosecution. Simultaneously, he has been selected and is currently serving as President of the Texas District and County Attorney's Association (TDCAA) which has nearly 6000 members. From that platform, Lee has continued the effort to put child abuse cases first across Texas. His work to protect the children of Polk County in particular, and the children in Texas, in general, is unmatched.

This year Lee Hon was nominated for the highest award given to prosecutors by CACTX, the prestigious Partners in Courage (PIC) MDT award. This award is given "to recognize outstanding individuals who, in various capacities, are making a true difference in the lives of child abuse victims in a children's advocacy center (CAC) setting". Although CACTX received a substantial number of nominations for this category and each entry was considered by a Selection Committee made up of three CACTX Board members, Lee Hon was chosen. As is stated in the official announcement:

William Lee Hon, Partner in Courage – MDT Member Award (recognizing an individual multidisciplinary team member who, in their professional capacity, has made a significant and outstanding contribution to a CAC in Texas during the past year) ...

Mr. Hon's commitment to the children of Polk County and throughout Texas is exemplary and he is well deserving of this award.

With Lee Hon's continued involvement with Childrenz Haven, the Center hopes to fulfill its mission: "to provide a neutral, non-biased, child friendly agency that facilitates a multidisciplinary approach in the prevention, detection, investigation and treatment of child abuse" so that Polk County never again faces a tragedy like that suffered by little Anthony Boone.