



Navigating through to get things done

The call to serve others was instilled early and reinforced frequently

Incoming ASWB president Timothy Martel Brown is Texas born and bred, and he has an unusual story about his arrival. His mother, pregnant at the time with Tim, was attending a baby shower for a friend of the family, he recounts. A dog went after a baby at the party. His mother tried to grab the dog and fell, which induced labor three months ahead of schedule. Tim was born on the day before hurricane Carla hit Texas. Asked what the story means to him, Brown responds: "It may explain why I am calm while in the midst of a storm going on around me. I am able to navigate through to take care of things." And navigating a busy schedule and finding time to help others has been a hallmark of Brown's throughout his career.

Brown has taken on increasingly responsible roles throughout his career, from a front line social worker to a manager to director and now associate chief social work, mental health, for the second largest Veterans Administration (VA) system in the United States. In addition, he has served as a field placement instructor for a number of colleges and universities in



*Incoming ASWB president
Timothy Martel Brown*

Texas and has provided clinical supervision for licensure candidates as a Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners board approved supervisor. He has served on nonprofit boards of organizations dedicated to community health care interests such as seniors with disabilities and special needs populations. Within the profession, he has held multiple leadership positions with the Texas chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), the VA, and ASWB.

Social work was not where Brown's studies were initially taking him. But empathy toward others developed early, he says, thanks in large part to three women who taught him the importance of helping others. He credits them with helping to shape his life and choice of career in social work. The first of these influencers was his great-grandmother.

Like many native Texans, Brown has deep pride in his family's Texas roots. His mother's family settled in the Brazos Valley in the 1800s, and his great-grandmother was an early entrepreneur who built the first Greyhound bus station. She also ran a boarding home next door

to the station. During the Depression, Brown explains, she set out a picnic table in her yard and offered lunch and dinner to anyone who needed a meal. “She had strong empathetic tendencies toward her fellow man,” said Brown. “I spent a lot of time with her as I was growing up and learned to help others in need.”

Fast forward to Brown’s high school years and his encounter with the second woman to influence him, an Irish Catholic nun named Sister Bernard Marie. Brown describes growing close to her when he was working as an orderly in the Catholic hospital where he was born. “She took to me and taught me how to care for others,” Brown said.

Brown met the third woman who would influence him when he was working at a psychiatric hospital. Ann Hazen was a nurse, but also a social worker. At the time he met Hazen, he was studying science but unsure where he was going to go with his studies. She encouraged him to redirect his energies into social work, as he had “natural tendencies to help people.” In hindsight, Brown notes, “it was a good choice.”

Brown received his Bachelor of Social Work degree from Prairie View A & M University, a historically black college or university (HBCU), which was the closest college with a social work track to where he was living in Bryan, Texas. He went on to get his Master of Social Work degree with a specialization in end of life care at Baylor University.

The specialization was almost an afterthought, Brown notes.

His cohort had not focused on a specialty. He discovered that to receive the end of life care certification he could use his work experience in and papers he had published on community and palliative care through his affiliation with Hospice Brazos Valley. At the time, he was a national lecturer on the emerging field of palliative care in the U.S.

Before receiving his social work degrees, Brown was licensed as a social work associate in Texas. The license was available to candidates who were high school graduates with a few years of social work experience or had a non-social work degree. He recalls that the day he was supposed to test, the testing center had run out of paper test forms for the associate exam. The test center gave him the Bachelors licensing exam instead. He then sat for the Bachelors exam in his final semester at Prairie View for his bachelor social work license and the Masters exam for the master social work license before graduating from Baylor. He got his clinical supervision while working as weekend psychosocial therapist at the behavioral health unit at St. Joseph Regional Health Care Center from 2004 to 2006 and passed the Clinical exam in 2007.

Brown’s early career was spent in general and psychiatric hospital settings. In 1992 following the closure of the psychiatric hospital where he had been a mental health worker and promoted to manager of social services before the closing of the hospital, he followed his mentor Hazen to the hospice program she founded in the late 1980s, Hospice Brazos Valley. He spent 17 years there, working his way from social worker to clinical

director, mission support. “A door was closing and another was opening at the perfect time,” he said of the transition.

When he started at the hospice, the program was serving six patients. By the time he left in 2008, the number of patients had grown to 158, and the hospice was serving 19 counties with three service sites, one inpatient facility, and three resell stores. “Hospice Brazos Valley was a nonprofit program that never turned anyone away, no matter their ability to pay or reimburse for their care,” he said.

It was while working at the hospice that Brown first learned about the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners. He was serving at the time as the chair of the Brazos Valley unit of NASW-Texas and approached Jeannie McGuire, who was then chair of the regulatory board, about an ethical dilemma. After they had talked through the issue, McGuire told him that his understanding of the complexities of social work ethics would be an asset on the board. She put his name in for consideration.

In 2004, then governor Rick Perry appointed Brown to the board to fill the master social worker seat. In 2008, Perry reappointed Brown, this time to the clinical seat, and also appointed him board chair. In 2013, Brown was reappointed for an unprecedented third term and a second term as board chair. Brown’s current term will end in 2019.

Despite a fulfilling career in end of life care, Brown said he felt that after “working with death for so many years” he needed a change in his service. He chose to focus on serving veterans in the wake

of 9/11. He accepted employment at the Veterans Administration North Texas Health Care System (VANTHCS) as program manager of the community residential care program in 2008. In 2010 he became associate chief social work, mental health, and continues in that role, providing clinical supervision to 170 social workers across the mental health service line and serving as director over five programs in the largest mental health line in the VA. The VANTHCS covers North Texas and two counties in Oklahoma.

Brown is understandably proud of the Veteran Justice Outreach (VJO) program, which was offered in only one veteran justice court when he started at VANTHCS. Today, six courts in the North Texas area adjudicate cases of combat vets with mental health issues. When the veteran successfully completes the program, the veteran's record is expunged. Vets who participate in the program receive ongoing care from the VA so that they can reintegrate into society without further issues. The program has a 92 percent success rate. The other programs he oversees are suicide prevention, psychosocial rehabilitation recovery center, mental health intensive case management, and the community residential care program.

"Down time" does not seem to be in Brown's vocabulary. He spends five to ten hours a week on board business, and the full board meets four times a year. He also chairs the Ethics and Rules Committee, which meets eight times a year. Last year he led the board through a volatile sunset review process that resulted in legislation to consolidate the

social work board with other health care professions. The bill was defeated this year, which means that the board will continue as currently structured until 2019. At that time sunset review will take place again.

"Serving on the [regulatory] board has expanded my understanding of politics, social work practice, and public protection," said Brown. "It's been very exciting to learn how to navigate and work with a complex bureaucracy and multiple stakeholders."

Among his accomplishments while chairing the board, Brown discusses improvements made to the standards for providers offering supervision courses in support of the board approved supervisor recognition. He worked with Dorinda Noble during her time on the board, to provide greater consistency related to the expectations for supervisor training. The new standards were introduced in 2014.

While on the Texas board, Brown also has been involved with ASWB in multiple capacities. He has served as delegate and been appointed to or chaired numerous committees that include Program and Education, Bylaws and Resolutions, Nominating, and Finance. He also was an item writer for the Masters exam. From 2010 to 2011, he served as treasurer and chair of the Finance Committee. In 2014 he received the Sunny Andrews Award for Outstanding Commitment to Social Work Regulatory Board Service. He co-facilitated the first Board Member Exchange in 2015 and was a presenter at the 2017 Education Conference on continuing competence. The topic of his presentation: how the Texas

board strengthened the licensing process by introducing a jurisprudence examination, which he helped develop.

For Brown, service on the regulatory board has been his way of giving back to society and the profession that has fulfilled him. "As a regulator I have worked to ensure public protection, but always cognizant to be mindful of actions to not harm the profession."

As Brown prepares to step into the role of ASWB president in November, he looks forward to navigating new leadership responsibilities and helping the association fulfill current objectives and identify new strategic initiatives.