
ProBonoNY

AN ACCESS TO JUSTICE PARTNERSHIP FOR THE POOR

NEWSLETTER For Local Action Committees

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News from the Seventh District **By Linda Kostin**

As the recently added Pro Bono Coordinator for the Seventh Judicial District ProBonoNY Committee, I'd like to thank the other pro bono coordinators for taking time out of their busy schedules to chat with me about their current projects and past successes. You've shaved time off my learning curve, and I couldn't be more grateful.

The Seventh District Pro Bono Action Committee has set several goals for the expansion of pro bono services. The first goal is to increase substantially attorneys' participation in pro bono matters. To support this goal, I'm drawing upon my recent experience as a freelance journalist.

Starting this month, I'm writing a monthly column for *The Daily Record*, the newspaper targeted at Rochester's legal community. A dedicated volunteer attorney will be spotlighted, and we'll publicly salute all attorneys who have taken cases or participated in clinics in the preceding month with a pro bono honor roll. We're hoping that by providing public recognition for volunteer attorneys, we'll be able to attract more volunteers.

The Committee's second goal is to increase substantially the amount of time that attorneys spend rendering free legal services to the poor. This goal was supported by the recent "adoption" of Volunteer Legal Services Project's monthly debt clinic by corporate law departments partnering with law firms. Several attorneys who have volunteered on an ad hoc basis in the past have stepped up their commitments by signing up to render additional pro bono services at future clinics. The debt clinic "adoption" also supports the Committee's goal to increase the number of volunteer attorneys. Some of the attorneys participating in the "adopted" clinics have not done pro bono work before.

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The debt clinic "adoption" was the subject of a front-page article in the September 5th issue of *The Daily Record*, raising the legal community's awareness of unmet legal needs of low-income people and pro bono opportunities for attorneys. The article included information about debt clinics available for "adoption" in 2009, which we hope will result in additional attorneys stepping up.

The Seventh District is planning an on-line press kit to facilitate relations with other media outlets. This will help us meet the Committee's third goal: to increase substantially the number of clients served by pro bono attorneys. We're striving to get information out to prospective clients and members of the community who might provide client referrals.

Looking ahead, several possibilities for events are under consideration. There will be a focus on encouraging attendance by members of the judiciary as a means to support the Committee's goal of increased recruitment.

Eighth District Activities **By Amanda Warner**

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY PROGRAM

On June 23, 2008, the Eighth Judicial District Committee co-sponsored a CLE program entitled, "Providing Pro Bono Services in Chautauqua County: Needs, Challenges, and Current Practices," with the Jamestown Bar Association, the Bar Association of Northern Chautauqua, Legal Aid for the Chautauqua Region, and Southern Tier Legal Services. The hour-long program was held at the new Supreme Court Jury Presentation Room in Mayville and was moderated by Hon. Paula L. Feroletto, Justice of the Supreme Court and member of the Eighth District Pro Bono Committee, who was instrumental in organizing the event and identifying key participants

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Eighth District Activities

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from the Chautauqua Region. Hon. Stephen W. Cass, Chautauqua County Surrogate, spoke about the importance of pro bono work to the courts and in promoting access to justice for poor people. Margaret C. Callanan, Esq., Principal Counsel to the Attorney Grievance Committee for the Eighth Judicial District, gave a presentation on ethical considerations in pro bono practice and provided an update on the Grievance Committee's activities.

The program concluded with a panel of attorneys in private practice and attorneys in practice with not-for-profit service providers, including Sally Jaroszynski, Esq., of Legal Aid for the Chautauqua Region and member of the Eighth District Pro Bono Committee; Todd Thomas, Esq., of Southern Tier Legal Services; Robert A. Liebers, Esq., of Burgett & Robbins; Robert W. Schnizler, Esq.; Michael J. Sullivan, Esq.; and Sandra Fisher Swanson, Esq. The private attorneys on the panel discussed the ways in which they have been involved with pro bono work, highlighting the many different kinds of pro bono opportunities available as well as the benefits of doing pro bono work in collaboration with legal services and pro bono programs. The legal services attorneys addressed areas of need and opportunities for new partnerships in pro bono in the region.

Approximately 45 attorneys attended the program and the lunch held afterward. We are in the process of scheduling follow-up meetings involving members of the judiciary, bar associations of Chautauqua County, Legal Aid for the Chautauqua Region, and Southern Tier Legal Services, to discuss specific pro bono opportunities and to sign up attorneys for pro bono work.

LARGE FIRM INITIATIVE

In August, as part of the Committee's on-going initiative to encourage pro bono work by attorneys in the District's larger law firms, I

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coordinated an in-house matrimonial training program at the Buffalo offices of Hodgson Russ, the second firm to join the Committee's Large Firm Initiative, in which the initial participant was the Phillips Lytle firm. Trainers included Katherine Bestine, Esq., an experienced matrimonial attorney from Buffalo; Christine Saturnino, Esq., Law Clerk to Hon. Janice M. Rosa, J.S.C., Supervising Judge of Matrimonial Matters; and myself (based on my own experience as a practitioner in the field). Seven attorneys received 3.5 CLE credits for attending the training, in exchange for their commitment to accept a pro bono divorce referral.

We are also planning a reception to recognize the Phillips Lytle attorneys who took part in the Large Firm Initiative last fall, all of whom have accepted pro bono divorce cases referred by the Erie County Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Project. The reception will be to thank those attorneys for volunteering to be the first "class" of attorneys to participate in the Initiative, to assess the training program in light of the attorneys' first pro bono divorce case experience, and to recruit the next class of attorneys to participate in the Initiative.

Notes and Comments

By John Ritchie

MORE GREAT NEWS! As forecast in the last issue of the Newsletter, ProBonoNY has now added a fifth attorney pro bono coordinator: as of September 15, Suzanne Myette is working with the Sixth Judicial District Pro Bono Committee. Suzanne is headquartered at Legal Aid Society of Mid-New York, Binghamton office, and can be reached at 607-231-5900. More soon about Suzanne and the work of the Sixth District Committee.

Topic to consider: as committees mature, develop a plan, make the plan operational, gain a pro bono coordinator, and so forth—what should be the committees' on-going activities?

Many possible answers, different for different committees, including participation by judges in recruiting activities and CLE programs; private attorneys as event organizers and presenters; service providers continuously monitoring and reporting both achievements and unmet needs; committees planning new service programs.

Your thoughts in a paragraph or two for the Newsletter would be very welcome!