

Thoughts on our professional responsibility to give back

Lawyers have a professional responsibility to participate in community service, charitable and pro bono activities. Our participation makes the legal profession better for everyone, including our future leaders. This point was stressed at the 2012 Bench and Bar Professional Development Conference at Camden on the Lake. My family and I look forward to the conference each year. Although there were many great presentations and speakers, the presentation dedicated to the Ethics of Pro Bono Representation particularly resonated with me. The presenters discussed ABA Rule 6.1 Voluntary Pro Bono Publico Service, which imposes a professional responsibility on lawyers to annually provide 50 hours of pro bono public legal services to those unable to pay. Additionally, they encouraged lawyers to give back to the legal profession and the community.

When pro bono representation is not an option, lawyers can also fulfill their professional responsibility by participating in activities for improving the law, the legal system, or the legal profession. ABA Rule 6.1 also states that “a lawyer should contribute financial support to organizations that provide legal services to persons of limited means.” Thus, as Frankie Freeman expressed in her speech after being honored as 2011 Citizen of the Year, we have a responsibility to make St. Louis a better place by giving back with our time and/or money.

I have dedicated my life to public service and to making the community better as a gift to future generations. I am very active in the legal community, the national, state and local bar associations, as well as the St. Louis community. As



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a government attorney (with the Circuit Attorney's Office of St. Louis City from 1998 to 2004 and currently with the Missouri Attorney General's Office since 2004), there are restrictions on whom we can represent. While pro bono representation is generally not an option, there are many alternative ways government attorneys can contribute. Since I cannot represent pro bono clients, I frequently conduct a family law-related CLE presentation for Legal Services of Eastern Missouri and provide valuable information their staff and attorneys can use when representing indigent clients. I also give financially to organizations that provide pro bono services.

Additionally, the Missouri Attorney General's Office appreciates lawyers who volunteer their free time with The Missouri Bar and local bar associations for the purpose of improving the legal profession and system. BAMSL provides many opportunities to “get involved,” including their Speaker's Bureau, Mock Trial and Call-A-Lawyer.

In 1993, The American Bar Association resolved to establish policies in support of community service programs that “(1) challenge teens and young adults to develop a sense of purpose and self-worth; (2) revitalize urban area by fostering civic pride and volunteerism and (3) join with coalitions to help prevent the erosion of families and communities through drug abuse and related crime and violence.” It further resolved to encourage community service program participation by attorneys, law firms and law schools.

I am very pleased that BAMSL has successfully implemented the recommendations of the ABA and has

made a difference in the St. Louis urban community. Specifically, BAMSL has partnered with the Mathews-Dickey (Boys' & Girls' Club) After School Tutor Program to match lawyers and judges with students to provide educational assistance and to serve as youth mentors. The commitment is one hour per week and the rewards are enormous. Mathews-Dickey is a life-changing organization for youth in North St. Louis where I grew up. As children, my younger brother and I participated in their summer athletic programs as it was an affordable option for my parents who could not afford to send us to camp. I am most proud of my 1985 VP Fair Invitational Tennis Award for Second Place in the doubles competition earned after learning how to play tennis at Matthews-Dickey. My trophy was my first award and sits in my home office with my 2009 Public Service Practitioner Award from Missouri Lawyers Media. I know the lessons learned at Matthews-Dickey (including working hard, understanding and following the rules of the game, practicing every day, being a team player, never giving up and accepting the fact you have to lose in order to know how to win) helped me to achieve great things.

It has been said to whom much is given much is expected. Lawyers have been given so much and it is time for us to give back. Please invest in yourself by investing in others; the return is great! I encourage you all to join BAMSL in providing support to community service programs. Although there are many opportunities to select from, Matthews-Dickey After School Tutor Program is a great choice because of its critical role in developing future leaders and sustaining families and communities in North St. Louis. Please contact Matthews-Dickey directly to make donations of time or money. ■