

# Resolutions?

Most of us view the start of a new year as the time to make meaningful resolutions for the coming year. These resolutions often focus on steps we can take to improve our lives – getting in better physical shape, eating smarter and healthier, and spending more time with our family and loved ones.



by Jim Guest, Director of the Volunteer Lawyers Program, Legal Services of Eastern Missouri

For lawyers, it is also a time when many of us resolve to rededicate ourselves to providing some pro bono service during the year to help improve the lives of others. There are so many people in our community who need critical legal assistance but cannot hope to

afford the cost of an attorney. Providing legal assistance to these individuals and families is a unique way attorneys and others in the legal community can get involved and really improve the lives of others.

As with all our resolutions, February is a good time to take an early look at how we are all doing on our commitments. Have we made them a priority and stuck to our goals?

At Legal Services of Eastern Missouri's

(LSEM) Volunteer Lawyers Program, it is evident that the pro bono related resolutions have been working. Clearly many have made, and continue to make, volunteer legal service a priority in 2013. We have been able to refer dozens of cases already this year, making a significant difference in the lives of people in our community.

But the need for assistance is greater than ever – estimates are that fewer than 25 percent of people needing assistance obtain the help they truly require to protect themselves and their families. While legal services providers do a great job as much assistance as they can, if we are really going to bridge this disturbing justice gap, it is imperative that lawyers in the community help meet some of this need.

Just last month, a single father of three daughters sought help contesting an eviction. The client was current on his rent, but despite a valid lease, his landlord wanted him and his daughters out so he could rent the apartment unit to someone else. Losing the family's housing would have been devastating – they had nowhere to go and the middle child was finally at a school receiving special education services she needed. The father had pleaded with his landlord, but the landlord had ignored him and moved forward with the unlawful eviction.

A dedicated volunteer accepted the

case and accompanied the father to court. The lawyer was able to convince the landlord's attorney to dismiss the case in its entirety. This volunteer spent less than 12 hours total on the case – meeting with the client, reviewing rent receipts and the landlord's petition and going to court – yet still made a very important difference in the lives of this family. The family was able to preserve their basic housing and continue the important education services for the daughter who needed them.

It is my hope that all of us can make and stick to a resolution to provide this same type of service over the next ten months - either through the Volunteer Lawyers Program or some other provider that works with people in need.

Finally, I hope that everyone will resolve to attend this year's Justice For All Ball on February 23 at the Chase Park Plaza. This gala event, benefitting LSEM, is a night when over six hundred members of our generous legal community gather to not only support an important cause, but also connect with friends and have a great time. Details about the Ball and how to register can be found on the LSEM website, [www.lsem.org](http://www.lsem.org).

In the meantime, if you are interested in learning more about pro bono opportunities through the Volunteer Lawyers Program, please contact Jim Guest at [jhguest@lsem.org](mailto:jhguest@lsem.org). ■

## Minorities in the Legal Profession announce distribution of Annual Diversity Survey

The Minorities in the Legal Profession (MILP) Committee has completed our Annual MILP Survey of St. Louis Law Firms and Legal Departments. It will be distributed to the 50 largest St. Louis firms and legal departments this month (February 2013).

This survey is being conducted by the Bar Association of Metropolitan St. Louis (BAMSL). Since February 15, 2012, when BAMSL's Board of Governors adopted and approved The St. Louis Call to Action for Racial and Ethnic Diversity, the committee has worked tirelessly to assist in the realization of a truly diverse profession by promoting racial and ethnic diversity in law firms.

To that end, we urge firms to complete the MILP survey by

April 30, 2013. BAMSL will analyze the survey results to assess minority inclusion in the metropolitan St. Louis legal market, better serve the St. Louis minority community and foster increased diversity in our profession in the St. Louis Region.

The St. Louis Call to Action For Racial and Ethnic Diversity along with the Annual Minorities in the Legal Profession Survey of St. Louis Law Firms and Legal Departments can be accessed and downloaded from the BAMSL website from the following link: [http://www.bamsl.org/associations/8640/files/BAMSL\\_MILP\\_Survey\\_Form\\_2013.pdf](http://www.bamsl.org/associations/8640/files/BAMSL_MILP_Survey_Form_2013.pdf). The completed form can be mailed to BAMSL c/o Nicole Colbert-Botchway, MILP Co-Chair or Shannan Deemie, the MILP Liaison. ■