

## Pro Bono: Serving the Public, Making a Difference

National Pro Bono Week is October 20–26. Launched in 2009 by the ABA, the goal of the week-long celebration of pro bono is threefold: (1) to recognize the significant contributions made by thousands of attorneys who serve the public by performing pro bono legal services; (2) to educate the public and the legal profession about the ever-growing unmet legal needs of low-income people; and (3) to encourage more attorneys to volunteer.

The Albany kick-off celebration, held on Friday, October 18, recognized area judges who have made significant contributions to pro bono. Honorees included retired U.S. Magistrate Judge George H. Lowe, co-chair of the NYSBA President's Committee on Access to Justice; Hon. Christine Clark (Fourth Judicial District); Hon. Gary Stiglmeier (Third Judicial District); Hon. Richard Littlefield (U.S. Bankruptcy Court); and retired Justice of the Supreme Court George Ceresia (former Administrative Judge of the Third Judicial District). Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman was joined by representatives of the Albany Law School Pro Bono Society to present the awards.

On October 24, the NYSBA will join with the Honorable Fern Fisher, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for the Civil Courts and Director of the Access to Justice Office of the Courts, representatives from the New York City Mayor's Office, and the leaders of

the New York County Lawyers Association at NYCLA's headquarters to recognize the pro bono contributions of New York City attorneys.

We again congratulate those members of the State Bar Association who participated in the Empire State Counsel program. Initiated by Past President Mark Alcott, the Empire State Counsel program recognizes members who have performed 50 or more hours of pro bono service in the preceding year. In 2012, 1,606 NYSBA members enrolled in this program and donated 294,218 pro bono hours.

President-elect Glenn Lau-Kee, Past President Vince Doyle and I are participating in the Chief Judge's Hearings on Civil Legal Services in the four Judicial Departments. Starting in September and continuing through October, these hearings include topics such as the impact of legal services funding on meeting legal needs of the poor and those affected by natural disasters, understanding the economic and social consequences of the lack of sufficient legal services, and exploring the potential for reducing unmet legal needs. It is estimated that less than 20% of the legal needs of low income New Yorkers are currently being met.

Just as an indigent defendant in a criminal case cannot be assured of a fair trial unless counsel is provided, indigent parties in civil cases who appear in court without a lawyer cannot be assured of a fair hearing in



matters involving basic issues such as family matters, housing, health care, subsistence income or domestic violence. In this year, we celebrate the 50th anniversary of *Gideon v. Wainwright* and on October 3 we hosted a Civil Gideon Law School Symposium in which all New York law schools, plus the Rutgers, Seton Hall and Yale law schools, participated by linking electronically to the NYSBA for the first half of the event.

By encouraging and supporting pro bono, advocating increased funding for civil legal services, and advancing the concept of "Civil Gideon" (the right to legal representation in civil cases involving life's necessities), the State Bar continues its commitment to access to justice. Thanks to all our members for helping to make justice for all a reality.

This month, we also celebrate the 50th anniversary of New York's Civil Practice Law and Rules. This issue of the *Journal* is devoted to a discussion of the history and development of those rules and their status in practice today. We hope you will find this background on the evolution of the CPLR interesting, and we thank our contributors to this special issue for their excellent work. ■

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