Making a Difference

The Pennsylvania Bar News column that highlights Pennsylvania attorneys who make a difference in their communities by providing extraordinary pro bono service and/or other community services in the public interest.

Lisa A. Shearman, Montgomery County

Lisa A. Shearman practices in the Lansdale, Montgomery County, office of Hamburg, Rubin, Mullin, Maxwell & Lupin PC.

Describe your pro bono work.
I work on many pro bono projects, including Villanova Law School’s Lawyering Together program, but I focus most of my pro bono efforts on “Wills for Heroes.” I have been involved with “Wills for Heroes” since 2008. I initially started as a volunteer and am now a statewide coordinator for Pennsylvania, as well as the affiliate director of the national organization. “Wills for Heroes” provides free estate planning documents to first responders and veterans. Volunteers spend many Saturdays at fire houses, police stations, prisons and public-safety training sites preparing wills and powers of attorney for those who have risked their lives to serve our country and those who daily risk their lives to protect our communities. I travel to many Pennsylvania counties for the statewide program and remotely assist other states in setting up similar programs.

Why do you participate in pro bono?
I enjoy the opportunity to help others. It is a wonderful way to meet members of our community and to assist them with their legal needs, whether by preparing their wills or by helping with other legal problems.

How did you first become involved?
My mother instilled in me at a young age the concept of “giving back.” Since then I have sought opportunities to volunteer my time and talents. After volunteering at my first “Wills for Heroes” event, I instantly fell in love with the program. Shortly thereafter, Dan McKenna, founder of the Pennsylvania program and president of the Wills for Heroes Foundation, recruited me to take on a more active role.

Have your pro bono cases dealt with legal issues different from your regular practice areas? If so, how did you adapt?
Most of my pro bono cases are within my regular practice area. When I am asked to help with an issue that falls outside my regular practice I am fortunate to be able to turn to colleagues at my firm who are skilled in numerous and diverse areas of the law.

What have been the personal rewards?
The thanks I receive from those I serve and knowing that I’ve made a difference for them are the greatest rewards. I have met so many wonderful people through the “Wills for Heroes” program: first responders and military veterans and their families as well as fellow volunteers, including judges, attorneys, paralegals, law students, notaries and witnesses. The variety of legal issues we encounter strengthens my legal practice and challenges me.

Describe your other community service.
I participate in the Liberty and Law Civics Education Program sponsored by the Montgomery Bar Association. Every month I am fortunate to teach local sixth graders about different aspects of the law. It is fun and interesting to hear the perspectives of 12-year-olds. I have served as a moot court judge for the American Association for Justice Regional Trial Advocacy Competition and as a juror for the PBA YLD Statewide High School Mock Trial Competition. I serve on several nonprofit boards, including the Montgomery County Community College Planned Giving Advisory Board and the Legal Clinic for the Disabled. In addition, I am involved with the Women in Law Committee for our local bar association and the PBA Commission on Women in the Profession and the different projects they sponsor. I also volunteer at my daughters’ schools for various events and projects.

How does it “make a difference”?
All pro bono work makes a difference because we are helping to solve legal problems. Ensuring that our first responders and veterans have basic wills and powers of attorney provides them and their families with some peace of mind. I have seen firsthand the emotional and financial costs, family discord and rifts that can result from improper planning. It is very satisfying to know that I play an integral part in making challenging times less difficult. Over the past six years, “Wills for Heroes” volunteers have touched thousands of lives and we hope to continue to touch thousands more.