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.

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Describe your pro bono work.
I have been the Lancaster County “Wills for Heroes” attorney coordinator for four years. “Wills for Heroes” provides free estate planning documents to first responders. In Lancaster we hold four to six events each year where attorneys, notaries and paralegals dedicate an entire Saturday to provide these services. We are coming up on assisting our 1,000th client! I also routinely take on cases through MidPenn Legal Services, including matters in family law, unemployment compensation and others. I always have at least one active pro bono case through MidPenn but often have multiple cases at any given time. I don’t keep track of the total time (which I admit is odd for an attorney), but I estimate that I provide at least 200 hours of pro bono service per year.

Why do you participate in pro bono?
Actively volunteering my services, knowledge and experience comports with the kind of attorney and individual I wish to be. I believe it also sets an example for other attorneys, provides goodwill for our profession in the community and, hopefully, prompts the recipients of such services to “pay it forward” in any way they can.

How did you become involved?
When I started as an attorney, providing pro bono services was a great way of quickly getting experience with clients in various legal forums. Those experiences have been so rewarding that I have made an effort to continue.

Have your pro bono cases dealt with legal issues different from your regular practice areas? If so, how did you adapt?
I have been actively pursuing pro bono activities for the entire time that I have been practicing law. In fact, some of my “regular” practice areas were shaped by my pro bono activities. The legal issues and problems that one encounters doing pro bono work are often different than those of non-pro bono work; however, the experience one gets dealing with such issues can then be adapted and put toward assisting other clients.

What have been the personal rewards?
I certainly win points with my wife. Aside from that, it is enough to know that the attorney I am and the type of person I would like to be are corresponding ideals.

Please detail your other community service.
I volunteer for the “Stepping Out” program with the Lancaster Boys & Girls Club, which provides baseline knowledge about various legal issues to children. I am the immediate past chair of the Lancaster Bar Association (LBA) Young Lawyers Section and I am a member of the LBA board of directors. I also volunteer as an IRS-certified tax preparer for the VITA [Volunteer Income Tax Assistance] program, which provides free tax preparation services to individuals who meet certain financial qualifications.

How does it “make a difference”?
There are people who truly need assistance, and my pro bono work makes positive changes in their lives. It’s not just a monetary benefit; it’s a fundamental quality-of-life benefit. It is reflected in the gratitude I receive from those to whom I provide services. At the same time, I lead by example while changing the perception of what it means to be an attorney in my community.