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 legal services in the public interest.

William D. Clifford, Pittsburgh

As a Court-appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer, William D. Clifford of the Pittsburgh office of Dickie, McCamey & Chilcote PC, has viewed the effects of custody disputes on children. When another law firm was unable to continue a pro bono project to represent children in high-conflict custody cases, Clifford spearheaded an effort to bring the project to Dickie, McCamey. Now in its third year, that Child Custody Guardian Pro Bono Project is well-regarded by the court. It recently expanded to include additional law firms, with Dickie, McCamey attorneys serving as mentors.

Clifford has been instrumental in making pro bono part of the culture at Dickie, McCamey. Under Clifford’s leadership, the firm established the David B. Fawcett Pro Bono Award to honor the late shareholder’s commitment to pro bono work and to serve as an inspiration to all Dickie, McCamey attorneys.

Clifford’s pro bono activities also include protection-from-abuse cases through Neighborhood Legal Services, guardian ad litem cases for the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas and the Operation Safety Net legal clinic. He has also served on a pro bono basis as outside general counsel for the Sexual Assault Response Team of Allegheny County (SARTAC).

Why do you participate in pro bono?
I participate in pro bono activities for at least three reasons. First, my personal beliefs demand it. Second, pursuant to the Pennsylvania Constitution, Article 1, Section 11, all courts are to be open for every man and woman. This certainly is not the reality of our court system. As an officer of the court I am obligated to handle matters on a pro bono basis. Third, it was demonstrated to me by my late partner, David Fawcett, that the true measure of a fine lawyer is his compassion for others.

How did you first become involved?
I first got involved with CASA with my daughter. Through this great organization I was exposed to the many fine people who try to make a difference, one child at a time.

Have your pro bono cases dealt with legal issues different from your regular practice areas? If so, how did you adapt?
The pro bono cases that I handle are markedly different than the typical issues that I deal with as a construction lawyer. Quite frankly, invariably the stakes in my pro bono cases are the highest with which I have dealt. I adapted to the differences between my “day job” and pro bono matters by asking a lot of questions and observing the fine professionals involved in these cases on a daily basis.

What have been the personal rewards?
The best rewards have been my involvement with the people who care enough to put themselves out for those in need, including the loved, the unloved and the unlovable.

Constitution Day Celebration


Immigration Issues and Practice Top Lineup in Next Lawyer Magazine

Two immigration lawyers offer practice insights in the upcoming issue of The Pennsylvania Lawyer magazine. In “Immigration: The Persistent Problem,” Elena Park explores the current legal landscape, while Craig Shagin recounts the challenges and rewards he has found in “More Than Just a Law Practice.” Also featured in the issue:

- a former member of a Disciplinary Board hearing committee comments on the disciplinary process;
- two consultants on succession planning for solos and first-generation law firms;
- an award-winning author on how to handle the evasive witness — or the argumentative lawyer — during deposition; and
- a common pleas judge on a new way to prepare families for supervised visitation in child custody matters.

Watch for the November/December issue of The Pennsylvania Lawyer, in the mail the week of Oct. 28.