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.

Wendy G. Rothstein, Blue Bell

Wendy Rothstein is a partner in the Blue Bell office of Fox Rothschild LLP. She currently chairs the Montgomery Bar Association’s (MBA) Liberty & Law Civics Program, Summer 1L Diversity Internship Program and Bench-Bar Committee. Rothstein is also the vice president of the Norristown Zoological Society, which owns and operates the Elmwood Park Zoo.

Describe your pro bono work.
Children are our future — both in the legal profession and in the community. Helping them learn the importance of our court system is the main reason why I’ve served for the past two years as program chair for Liberty & Law, a civics-education program for sixth graders in the Norristown Area School District. Facilitated by the MBA, the program invites attorneys and judges into the classroom to present civics lessons throughout the school year. Our hope is to provide students with a familiarity of the court system to perhaps pique their interest in one day working within it in some capacity. Students benefit from the user friendly and interactive nature of the program because they’re encouraged to voice their opinions. This is something I’ve attempted to enhance by rewriting the curriculum this year.

Helping young lawyers who are just embarking on their legal careers is another area that is important to me, so this is the second year that I’ve chaired the MBA’s Summer 1L Diversity Internship Program. The annual program takes 10 students with diverse backgrounds who have just completed their first year of law school and matches them with internships at law firms throughout the county. Participating students are exposed to a series of speakers and given multiple opportunities to network, allowing them to get a jump-start on their legal careers and increasing the likelihood of attracting quality talent back to Montgomery County when it comes time for these students to apply for permanent jobs.

Additionally, I’ve served as a court-appointed discovery master in the Montgomery County Court of Common Pleas since 2001. In this capacity I donate my time to the court, hearing arguments and making recommendations to increase efficiency.

Why do you participate in pro bono?
My philosophy is that you should make yourself available to serve, and if you are asked to serve, you serve. For me it is an honor, never a burden. I also want those who benefit from the services to feel that the experience was worthwhile, so I try to provide value by enhancing the content, logistics, etc. of every program or initiative in which I get involved.

How did you become involved?
I’ve been an active member of the MBA for years and have a deep interest and background in helping others by providing leadership in service activities.

My involvement stemmed from calls asking me to serve. I was asked by Montgomery County Judge Carolyn Carluc cio to get involved in the Liberty & Law program and was asked by the chair of the MBA’s Diversity Committee to join the 1L Summer Diversity Internship Program. I was appointed by the county court to serve as a discovery master.

Have your pro bono cases dealt with legal issues different from your regular practice?
While my pro bono work does not deal specifically with cases, as a discovery master I deal with issues similar to those dealt with by an attorney handling a litigation case.

What have been the personal rewards?
To make an impact in someone’s life is an honor, and that’s what I hope we’re achieving through our work with students in the Liberty & Law program. I know for certain we are making a difference through the 1L program. We see firsthand the successes of those we’ve mentored or guided, and it is immensely gratifying to know we’ve played a role in helping them get there. Providing people with equal opportunities is also something incredibly important to me. I was the first woman hired by Pearlstein/Salkin Associates in 1982, so fostering diversity is something I hold dear. I also derive enjoyment from my service as a discovery master. It’s rewarding to be part of the invaluable service the system provides to the public by making the process more efficient for all involved.