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.

Anne N. John, Uniontown

Anne N. John, of John & John, Union-town, Fayette County, is the PBA secre-tary. She is a former Zone 6 governor on the PBA Board of Governors representing Fayette, Greene, Washington and Westmoreland counties. She received recog-nition for public service by the Fayette County Bar Association in 1992.

Describe your pro bono work.
Opportunities for pro bono work pres-ent themselves through direct legal rep-resentation in matters such as domestic relations cases as well as in service to com-munity organizations that assist those in need. In the early years of my practice I accepted criminal case appointments and conflict legal aid cases. I have engaged in pro bono work both by representing cli-ents who are in need of assistance but have limited resources and by volunteering with community and indus-try organizations such as a local consumer credit counseling agen-cy, industry consumer appeals boards and the Better Business Bureaus, providing free services that are legal in nature.

In my first year on the PBA board, the PBA implemented the White House initiative "Get Help Now Pennsylvania." The board, together with bar leaders and county bar associations, organized sites throughout the common-wealth that were staffed by our colleagues and members of the banking industry for the purpose of providing Pennsylvanians with information about legal and consum-er resources to assist them as the country came out of the recession.

Why do you participate in pro bono?
Pro bono publico means for the good of the public. The legal system should be ac-cessible to everyone, not just those who can afford to pay. I strongly believe that we should give back to the community that supports us and our families by reaching out to those who may not otherwise have access to legal services. I feel that we have not only a professional calling but a moral calling to do so, and I am gratified by the results of those services.

How did you become involved?
I've witnessed the efforts put forth by our colleagues for as long as I can remember, including observing my father's practice, and later my brother, Simon John. To-gether with the late Thomas Ruane they created the first Fayette County Public Defender's Office, following the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision in Gideon v. Wainwright, which established the right to counsel for the in-digent in criminal real matters. This commit-ment is particularly timely this year as we recognize the 50th an-niversary of that deci-sion and answer the call of Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Ronald D. Castille and PBA leadership to support pro bono programs. Our Pennsylvania Rules of Professional Conduct include a provision for us to render public interest legal service, and I believe that our practices are enhanced by our commitment to such service.

Have your pro bono cases dealt with legal issues different from your regular practice areas? If so, how did you adapt?
My pro bono work meshes well with my regular practice. Opportunities present themselves to assist individuals not only through direct representation but in ser-vice on boards and in organizations that provide assistance to those in need. Also, we are fortunate in Pennsylvania to be served by generous legal aid organizations, including the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network. These organizations provide a tremendous service, and I see the fruits of their efforts on a daily basis. We as prac-titioners have the opportunity to support them not only through direct representa-tion but through financial and time com-mittments.

What have been the personal rewards?
We engage in pro bono representation because we genuinely believe in its im-portance. My involvement with pro bono matters energizes my practice and reminds me of the importance of this work to the people we represent.