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.

Nathaniel L. Koonce II, Philadelphia

Nathaniel L. Koonce II is an associate in the Philadelphia office of Stradley Ronon Stevens & Young LLP.

Describe your pro bono work.

One of the projects that I participated in recently was an expungement clinic. The opportunity arose through a partnership between the Barristers’ Association of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Criminal Record Expungement Project, which aims to assist underserved members of our community. Michael B. Lee, who was profiled in an earlier “Making a Difference” column, trained the group and provided the participants with a thorough background of the expungement process, applicable Pennsylvania laws and criminal-record policy.

Why do you participate in pro bono?

My upbringing instilled in me the importance of giving back to the community. I believe that the empowerment of a community must come from within the community itself and I have always tried my best to empower my community and myself.

Describe your other community service.

I am a Big Brother to a 12-year-old through the Big Brothers Big Sisters organization and a board member for Big Brothers Big Sisters Southeastern Pennsylvania. I regularly volunteer at local elementary school, high school, college and law school events in Philadelphia to discuss the rewards and challenges of being a lawyer. Through Stradley Ronon I have been able to participate in the Police Athletic League’s 24 Math Challenge, assist with the annual Dropkicking Center Stairway to Our Future event, work with first-generation-to-college students through Philadelphia Futures, and join numerous efforts to raise funds for organizations that are serving the needs of the community. I also serve on the board of the Barristers’ Association of Philadelphia. The Barristers’ Association makes community service a priority by participating in events such as Thanksgiving turkey drives, expungement clinics, mediation programs to help students with nonviolent conflict resolution, programs with the Philadelphia Community Youth Court and fundraising for law student scholarships.

How does it “make a difference”?

One thing that I have discovered about community service is that the process of looking for personal value in the service diminishes the value of the experience. The Big Brothers Big Sisters organization used a survey to measure the difference that they made and found that more than 90 percent of former Little Brothers and Sisters said that their “Big” gave them hope and changed their perspective on what they thought was possible. If my community service or pro bono work can provide hope and perspective for just one person, then I have made a difference.