Melissa H. Shirey of The Family Law Group LLC, Erie, is the current as well as past (2006-10) chair of the Erie County Bar Association’s Attorneys & Kids Together (AKT) Program. The program helps meet the needs of students who are homeless by furnishing study rooms in the county’s homeless shelters; providing backpacks, school uniforms, sneakers and winter coats; administering a “Senior Fund” to pay for the special events associated with the senior year of high school; and supplying adult role models as mentors.

Describe your pro bono work.
In addition to my work with the AKT Program, I have completed numerous pro bono cases since being admitted to the bar in 2002. Most of these cases have been in my primary practice area, which is family law. The majority have been cases in which I represented mothers, fathers or grandparents in custody actions. I am also a frequent presenter for Northwestern Legal Services’ divorce clinic for pro se litigants.

Why do you participate in pro bono?
I participate in pro bono cases because I have always felt that it was important to give back. I have been fortunate in my life and understand there are many who are less so. If I can use my skills or knowledge as an attorney to help someone in need, I think that is just the right thing to do.

How did you become involved?
I first became involved as a first-year associate out of law school through Northwestern Legal Services.

What have been the personal rewards?
The personal reward has been in the form of the expressed appreciation of those I have helped. Most of the individuals obviously would not have been able to afford private legal counsel, and to have counsel provided to them in their legal matter is something I think they all appreciate greatly.

Editor’s note: The address and postage space at left has been added to the Pennsylvania Bar News in order to meet new postal regulations and qualify for the discounted mailing rates that we pass along to members. We have been able to make required design changes without losing any space previously devoted to articles, photographs or advertising. In addition, we are now able to add more color to photographs and advertising to bring you a more vibrant and engaging publication. You can anticipate a few more tweaks in the coming months.