

Pennsylvania Bar Association Young Lawyer Division ‘Wills for Heroes’ Program Director Honored by His Firm

Daniel J.T. McKenna, the dynamic driving force behind the “Wills for Heroes” program that provides free wills and other estate planning documents for Pennsylvania’s emergency responders, was honored in Philadelphia July 1, 2009, with the second annual Alan J. Davis Award for leading the national and statewide efforts of Ballard Spahr Andrews & Ingersoll L.L.P.’s Wills For Heroes team. McKenna was presented with a \$25,000 check for the national Wills for Heroes Foundation as part of his Davis Award, which was established by his firm in 2008 and is named in honor of the late Philadelphia City Solicitor.

Wills for Heroes is a project of the Pennsylvania Bar Association Young Lawyers Division and calls upon the expertise of lawyers throughout the state who are stepping forward to provide the free legal services. The project is co-sponsored by Ballard Spahr, which has designated Wills for Heroes as one of its public service projects. Since 2007, more than 100 Ballard attorneys and staff have been involved in clinics across the Commonwealth and around the nation producing more than 2,000 wills for first responders.

The Wills for Heroes program was founded by Anthony Hayes, a South Carolina lawyer who wanted to do something meaningful to help the country after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. He met with South Carolina firefighters and noted a glaring need for estate planning services. Hayes joined up with Jeffrey Jacobson, a then U.S. Attorney in Arizona, and the program expanded across the nation. McKenna, the third member of the national Wills For Heroes Board, brought the program to Pennsylvania and, through Ballard Spahr’s connections, helped triple the number of states involved to more than 20. Jacobson joined in the celebration of McKenna and the Ballard Wills for Heroes team, accepting the check on behalf of the foundation and noting that the donation increased the fund by nearly 350%.

Wills for Heroes events are being held in Pennsylvania communities upon request of leaders from local police, fire and emergency medical personnel organizations and upon request of county bar associations. On a scheduled day, a team of lawyers will bring computer laptops to a firehouse or meeting hall and spend at least an hour with each participant who pre-registers to attend the event.

A participant sits with a lawyer to review a questionnaire that the participant has filled out in advance. Answers are entered into a computer-based program. The lawyer reviews the resulting document with the participant to ensure its accuracy. After any necessary corrections are made, the will is printed, signed and notarized.

Upon request, lawyer volunteers also will work with each participant to prepare an advance medical directive, often called a “living will,” which specifies what actions should be taken for the participant’s health in the event that he or she can no longer make decisions due to illness or incapacity.

In addition, lawyers will prepare a durable power of attorney, a document that gives another person legal authority to act on behalf of the participant if the participant becomes incapacitated. These documents also are offered at no cost to participants.

Lawyer volunteers are not permitted to solicit business from project participants.

The American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division selected the “Wills for Heroes” as its 2007-08 national public service program. The computer software used for the program is provided by LexisNexis.

Founded in 1895, the Pennsylvania Bar Association strives to promote justice, professional excellence and respect for the law; improve public understanding of the legal system; facilitate access to legal services; and serve the 29,000 lawyers who are members of the association.