Lycoming County’s Kathleen Raker Receives PBA Pro Bono and Equal Justice Awards, Outstanding Law Firm Achievement Awards Also Presented, Jan. 12, 2015

Lycoming County Attorney Kathleen Raker was awarded a 2015 PBA Pro Bono Award at the Lycoming Law Associations’ Annual Banquet on Jan. 12, 2015, as well as the LLA’s 2015 Honorable Thomas Wood Jr. Equal Access to Justice Award. North Penn Legal Services Danna Rich-Collins, of the Williamsport Legal Services office, explained the reasons for the awards:

Tonight’s recipient has a passion for providing legal services to the poor. She did it in law school and then relocated to a place far from the city life she knew growing up and in school to be a “Legal Aid” attorney.

There were many cultural changes, moving to a largely rural area, one of which was learning to drive. But the legal problems weren’t that different from the city and the people were the same, they needed her help.

She is a very compassionate and helpful advocate. In this day and age of unbundled delivery of legal services this advocate triages the cases to find out how legal services can help with all possible issues not the opposite approach of trying to narrow it down to the one issue for which the client sought help. She has a good sense of the web of poverty and how that impacts numerous aspects of clients’ lives. She has a deep sense of Justice that epitomizes the quote “it is better to suffer injustice that to cause injustice.” After resigning from NPLS to raise a family tonight’s recipient used to call and remind us at NPLS that she was keeping her license current and that she was available for Pro Bono referrals. The areas of referral seemed unlimited. Help with research, briefs, representation in many areas of the law (custody, government benefits, housing to name a few) as well as co-counseling and mentoring.

When her boys were both in school full time she undertook a volunteer assignment of coming into NPLS office at least one day a week. The original plan was to take calls from individuals who had problems that were conducive to “brief service” representation. In other words, talk to the caller, ascertain the problem and give them advice on how to proceed. That advice might include pro se materials, a letter outlining the advice and ideally the case would close. Well we can all imagine how often the call can really be resolved that quickly and these cases became full service cases and often resulted in Landlord Tenant hearings, custody conferences and in some cases trial and lots of negotiation.

For over two years she came into the office regularly and handled a significant caseload all on a volunteer basis (72 cases). In addition to the above duties she trained an attorney in the area of Social Security, provided invaluable support and insight to the staff of NPLS, and it didn’t stop when she left for the week. She worked on the cases when she wasn’t in the office and was available for consultation on issues throughout the week.

That passion and enthusiasm for the work and the respect she showed our clients was an inspiration to the staff as well as an invaluable source of help to our clients. Her current position prevents her engaging in direct pro bono representation but her heart has led her to serve on the Legal Services to the Indigent Committee where her input is greatly appreciated.

The association also presented its Outstanding Law Firm Achievement Awards in recognition of outstanding commitment by the attorneys in the firms to Equal Justice for the Poor as demonstrated by 100 percent participation in the Lycoming County Pro Bono Referral Program. The firms recognized were:
The Lycoming Law Association Fair Share Awards were also presented to participating attorneys for their commitment to Equal Justice for the Poor by fair share participation in the Lycoming County Pro Bono Referral Program.

A full list of attorneys recognized with the Fair Share Awards may be viewed on the LLA website at http://www.lycolaw.org/news/articles/2015/2015probono.asp