

Dec. 30, 2009

## **Wrap-up of Pennsylvania's 2009 National Pro Bono Week Celebration**

A few days before the first-ever National Pro Bono Week celebration got under way, the number of events registered in Pennsylvania reached 30 and the national list showed more than 500, with at least one program in every state. That is when PBA Pro Bono Coordinator David Trevaskis knew that this idea from the ABA was one to replicate every year.

The purpose of Pro Bono Week — celebrated Oct. 25-31 in 2009 — is to showcase the work of individual lawyers, firms and other groups throughout the United States that serve the legal needs of the poor at no charge. And for that week in 2009, at least, pro bono efforts were in the spotlight, drawing media coverage, acknowledgement by government officials and other forms of public recognition.

Pro Bono Week was conceived and organized by the ABA Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service. Mark I. Schickman, a partner at Freeland Cooper & Foreman in San Francisco, chaired the committee from the event's 2007 conception until his term ended in August 2009 and then continued to lead during the final planning efforts.

Representative of the myriad of celebrations in Pennsylvania, in tandem with the National Pro Bono Celebration, the Berks County Bar Association held a special luncheon and an afternoon seminar to celebrate 40 years of legal services in Berks County and to honor its pro bono program participants. Allegheny County Senior Judge R. Stanton Wettick Jr., a veteran of the early days of the civil legal aid system, was the keynote speaker at lunch, and Judge John Jones of the U.S. Middle District of Pennsylvania helped with a seminar on pro bono service focusing on the Dover case he decided. Lancaster Mayor Rick Gray (one of the first executive directors of the local program) delivered remarks to the luncheon gathering, which included the Berks County alumni of Tri-County, Central Penn and MidPenn Legal Services. Berks bar Executive Director Don Smith coordinated the event. For more information, contact Smith at [smith@berksbar.org](mailto:smith@berksbar.org).

Similar events were held around the state and around the country, along with training programs and award ceremonies. Some groups tried a more offbeat approach to touting pro bono. In Utica, N.Y., for instance, the Oneida County Bar Association and a local law firm sponsored screenings of "To Kill a Mockingbird" at a historic downtown theater.

Even President Barack Obama recognized the event. In a statement issued during the week, Obama said the dedication of pro bono lawyers "reminds us of the impact each of us can have when we share our skills and talents to change the lives of others."

Regardless of the approach, Pro Bono Week events are intended to foster a wider awareness of the importance of pro bono and to bolster efforts of the private bar to fill the gap in unmet legal needs of the nation's poor. Trevaskis noted that for all of the celebrations during Pro Bono Week, the sad fact remains that most poor, and not so poor, people cannot access the services of an attorney for their civil legal matters.

What shape the week might take in the future is still to be determined, says A. Michael Pratt, a partner in the Philadelphia office of Pepper Hamilton L.L.P. and the new chair of the ABA Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service, but this year's celebration will be a tough act to follow. "We couldn't hope for anything better," said Pratt. "It's been phenomenal."