

LAWYERS JOURNAL

Foundation's many choices can help you make your own personal mark

By Lorrie Albert



We all want to make our mark, no matter how small, before we leave this world in the hope that it will be a better place and that all our hard work over the years has truly meant something. This ideal, in combination with a full-time demanding legal career, seems like it may slip away before you get a chance to accomplish it.

At the Allegheny County Bar Foundation, we work hard every day to expand our mission *to promote equal justice through public service, education, and philanthropy*. We are a small team of two full-time employees, a pro bono coordinator, and a part-time staff attorney. We administer a number of programs that really make a difference in the lives of not only the indigent, but also public service attorneys, law students, and the bar. Please see the *At A Glance* gray box next to this article for a short list of programs. More in-depth information can be found on our website at www.acbf.org.

You may believe in our mission to promote justice in our community, but think you do not have the time to make a significant difference. However, even small donations of time, effort, and money, either alone or combined, can help us move in the right direction to be able to continue our good work and help us make a better, stronger program.

We have our challenges just like every other foundation, but we have a plan and are moving forward and on-track. Through volunteering, education, and philanthropy, you can help us take this foundation to the next level.

How can you help? Here are three easy ways you can join our team:

1. Volunteer

Get involved with the Pro Bono Center. Call Pro Bono Coordinator Barbara Griffin (412-402-6677) or visit our website and find out what types of volunteer activities are available. Find out about the training schedule and pick projects that interest you. Get your firm involved with a signature project. Offer your services as a mentor or teach a CLE. Learn a new area. We will provide mentors, training, free research, and malpractice insurance. Volunteer as much or as little time as you want. If you are open to providing services to the indigent, we will let you know where the

need is and provide you with the support necessary to get the job done.

In 2005, Legal Services Corporation (LSC) estimated that at least 80 percent of the civil legal needs of low-income Americans are not being met. Moreover, 50 percent of the eligible people seeking assistance are being turned away for lack of program resources. Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network recently stated that since then, numerous statewide legal needs studies have found that LSC's report vastly underestimates the unmet civil legal needs of the country's poor. These numbers clearly show that we are barely scratching the surface, and there is much volunteer work to be done.

Be a Committee volunteer. Let us know if one of our programs interests you. Do you love golf and have a little extra time to devote to our Golf Committee? Does Public Service interest you and you would like to be considered for appointment to that committee or just get more involved in its projects? Maybe you are an existing Fellow and would like to become more involved with the Fellows Committee. You can also join one of the committees that help with fundraisers. We will hold a Pro Bono Rocks fundraiser in the fall and may be able to use your help.

Help our planned giving program. Volunteer to assist us in building our planned giving program. We will be moving forward in this area this year and we could use the help of estate attorneys or attorneys who are knowledgeable in setting-up gift-giving programs.

2. Educate

Help us educate bar members on all the work we do and programs we offer so that they have a better understanding of our efforts. We need support, but we can't get it without educating the bar. If a bar member has to ask what exactly the foundation does, then we are not getting our message out there. You can help us coordinate "road shows" at firms, even if it is only setting up one meeting at the firm where you work. We will do the work; we will come equipped with a presentation and information about the foundation and pro bono opportunities. Maybe you are a serious educator and you can offer some valuable input on planning our next Zitrain Forum which was created to focus on governmental and legal issues.

3. Donate

There are a variety of ways to help support the foundation. **Annual Make an Impact (dues check-off) Campaign.** We

only have one annual campaign to help us fuel our small staff on a day-to-day basis. These are the only funds that are unrestricted—the bread and butter of the organization. These donations help us operate effectively to further our mission. Most of our programs are run by restricted funds that are designated for particular purposes, and the Pro Bono Center operates on grants and fundraising events. Unrestricted funds are the hardest to raise, yet annual individual donations are essential to our survival! What good is having a great program, if we can't turn on the lights?

I am fortunate enough to be able to dedicate my time every day as the Director of the Foundation to help it become a solid base for the pro bono program and the other many important legal programs that we administer. If you do not have the time to volunteer, this is a perfect opportunity to do something really important. By donating to us, we can do the work for you. Everybody wins and you will help us build a foundation we can all be proud of.

In the past, we have suggested a \$50 donation to be paid at the same time you pay your dues statement to the ACBA. However, this has become more difficult as approximately 60 firms pay the dues with only one check for the entire firm and the attorneys do not have an opportunity to donate through their statement. This year, we are making a bar-wide solicitation for these funds. We have made it easier to donate online as well by clicking the Make a Donation button on our home page at www.acbf.org.

There are three major reasons to give now: 1) Corporate support is down this year, 2) there has been a significant decrease in IOLTA and other foundation giving; and, 3) we must rely on individuals like you to raise unrestricted funds. We can give you measurable returns. The Pro Bono Center comes out with a statistical report every year showing the number of volunteers and persons served through the member organizations and programs that work with the Center. Please see the *At a Glance* chart on this page for a list of programs, events, and amounts raised or distributed in 2008. These are concrete results.

Fundraisers: Please participate! Every dollar raised from our Attorneys Against Hunger Campaign goes directly to the food banks and organizations that feed the poor. The ACBA Golf Tournament in July helps both Neighborhood Legal Services and the ACBF. Pro Bono Rocks will be held in November and supports the ACBF Pro Bono Center. Sponsorships and silent auction items are always welcome.

Named funds: We administer a number of named funds with distinct purposes. Some provide scholarships, loans, and awards for law students, some hold essay contests for high school students, and others sponsor educational programs for the bar and community. With a minimum gift of \$10,000 and with the approval of the Board of Trustees, a named fund can be established that carries any name and creates a legacy for charitable or educational purposes.

Endowment campaign: Once \$1,000,000 is raised, the foundation will be able to expand its pro bono efforts and educational service to the

community and award additional and/or larger grants under the Grants Program. Fund assets at the end of 2008 were \$975,978.

Planned gifts: We would welcome the opportunity to talk with you about making a planned gift to the foundation. Bequests are always welcome. We are in the stages of putting together our policy on other planned gifts and would invite an open discussion on any proposal.

Please consider joining forces with us at the foundation. We promise you that you will not be disappointed and you will see results which you will be able to claim ownership of as part of our team. Together, we can help you make your mark! ■

For more information on any of these programs, please go to www.acba.org or contact Lorrie Albert directly at 412-402-6640 or lalbert@acba.org.

Allegheny County Bar Foundation at a Glance

Mission: to be a driving force in promoting justice for all and to improve the community through public service law-related programs as the charitable arm of the ACBA.

Programs, events, and amounts raised or distributed in 2008:

- **Pro Bono Center**

Full-time coordinator provides you with new initiatives to help you meet your pro bono hours and supports you with free legal research, malpractice insurance, mentors, etc. Statistical Report indicates that there were 902 volunteers and 10,424 pro bono clients served through our member organizations and projects in 2007.

Divorce Law Project—provides over 150 no-fault divorces each year to low-income residents of Allegheny County.

- **Public Service activities**

Backpack project, blood drive, Law Day, volunteer recognition event, "Calling All Suits" campaign, I-Can E-File tax program.

- **Attorneys Against Hunger Campaign**

Fundraising and outreach events—over \$119,000 for local hunger service agencies.

- **ACBA Golf Tournament**

\$56,000 for Neighborhood Legal Services and the ACBF.

- **Fellows Program**

Grants Program—\$25,000 for legal service providers in 2008; \$40,000 earmarked for 2009.

- **Named Funds/Loans & Scholarship Programs—\$32,250**

Louis Little Attorneys Memorial Fund
Daniel Dixon Scholarship Fund
Honorable Carol Los Mansmann Memorial Fund

Lynette Norton Memorial Fund

Honorable Joseph H. Ridge Memorial Scholarship Fund

James I. Smith, III Notre Dame Law School Scholarship Fund

Donald W. Bebenek Fund

Academy of Trial Lawyers William S. Schweers, Sr. Educational Fund/Essay Contest

Military Veterans and Elderly Fund

- **Zittrain Forum**

Educational programs

- **Lawyers Fund**

F.C. Grote Fund—\$15,000 in scholarships

Lawyers Assistance Fund—\$56,000 in assistance

- **Loan Repayment Assistance Program**

Approximately \$62,000

- **Endowment Campaign**

2008 year-end assets—\$975,978.

- **Juvenile Court Project**

Captive public interest law firm with 17 attorneys representing parents in dependency proceedings in Juvenile Court; fully-funded by County.

- **Other fundraisers**

Pro Bono Rocks—Nov. 6, 2009 at the Hard Rock Café. Mark your calendars!

Young Lawyers Division—Comedy Night (over \$19,000) and Skate-a-thon (\$4,454). The YLD did these on their own to help the foundation and AAH campaign.