

Pro Bono
Attorneys
Hold the Key
to Justice



Pro Bono Projects: Answering the Call for Legal Services

Judge Melvin A. Shortess (Ret.) rang a cowbell to attract attention to the Baton Rouge Bar Foundation Pro Bono Project's Lawyers Work for Food pro bono case drive and jambalaya lunch. Shortess received the 2006 Louisiana State Bar Association's David A. Hamilton Lifetime Achievement Award for his pro bono efforts. Photo provided by Baton Rouge Bar Association.

Baton Rouge Bar Foundation Pro Bono Project

By Rebecca S. Myhand

In 2006, the Baton Rouge Bar Foundation Pro Bono Project continued to expand its outreach efforts to meet the legal needs of the poor. In addition to its traditional placement of cases with volunteer attorneys, the Project began a disaster recovery legal clinic at Renaissance Park to assist Hurricane Katrina victims. Through this clinic, 36 clients needing civil legal assistance and help with the "Road Home" forms were assisted.

Another 2006 outreach effort was a Social Security clinic that offered 10 Louisiana State University Paul M. Hebert Law Center students the opportunity to participate in a hands-on learning experience. The students zealously represented their clients under the watchful eye of a volunteer attorney.

The Project's legal clinic, Thirst for

Justice, began its sixth year and has assisted 1,572 clients since its inception. The law firms of Gordon Arata; Taylor, Porter, Brooks & Phillips; McGlinchey Stafford; Keogh Cox & Wilson; Phelps Dunbar; Jones Walker; and Adams and Reese played an active role in Thirst for Justice by volunteering once a week for an entire month. As the majority of the cases are in the area of family law, the Project continued the use of its pro bono curator, a Baton Rouge Bar Foundation volunteer, who has agreed to serve as curator for all family law cases requiring one. The volunteers are truly the backbone of the Project.

Barbara Baier, 2007 Baton Rouge Bar Association president, said, "My very first involvement with the Baton Rouge Bar Association was with the Pro Bono Committee. From that membership, I've made many friendships, learned a great deal, received a lot of personal satisfaction and realized how valuable our work is in the community. I have been a member of the Pro Bono Committee since 1992 and truly believe that the Pro Bono Project is one of the most important elements of our association."

In 2007, the Project will continue to develop innovative ways to provide legal assistance to the poor while increasing participation by volunteer attorneys.

• (225)344-4803

Rebecca S. Myhand has been a pro bono coordinator for the Baton Rouge Bar Association since 1998. She graduated from Louisiana State University in 1994 and received a paralegal certificate from LSU in 1997. (544 Main St., Baton Rouge, LA 70802)



Central Louisiana Pro Bono Project

By Debbie Smith

In 1991, members of the Alexandria Bar Association Young Lawyers Section organized the Central Louisiana Pro Bono Project, Inc. for the purpose of providing voluntary, uncompensated legal

services to qualified persons referred by Legal Services of Central Louisiana, Inc. The Project also was organized to sponsor free legal advice clinics for the public. Attorney volunteers answer questions and provide general information concerning various legal matters.

The Project, in connection with Legal Services of Central Louisiana, hosts several Pro Se Divorce Clinics during the year to help those who meet Legal Services' guidelines obtain an uncontested divorce. At this time, all cases are referred to the Project from Legal Services of Central Louisiana. The Project is working toward in-house intakes for the near future. With this in mind, the Project will be hosting more free legal advice clinics throughout the year to reach clients who ordinarily would not be referred by Legal Services.

In the last 14 years, the type and number of cases the Project receives from Legal Services has grown. When the Project was formed, Legal Services only referred uncontested family matters. Now various matters in several areas of law, including successions, bankruptcy, re-dhibition, mental health, interdiction, name change, custody and divorce, are referred to the Project for placement with the private bar. The Project refers approximately 125-150 civil cases each year.

The Louisiana Bar Foundation, through IOLTA funds, has been instrumental in helping the Project achieve its goals. Subgrant funds and project fundraising supplement these funds. The combination of these funds allows the Project to employ a project director, currently the Project's sole employee.

• (318)449-9778

Debbie Smith has been the project director of the Central Louisiana Pro Bono Project, Inc. for the past nine years. Among her many duties is referring cases to attorney volunteers in the Central Louisiana area, including Vernon, Avoyelles and Rapides parishes. (2015 MacArthur Dr., Bldg. #3, Alexandria, LA 71301)



Lafayette Volunteer Lawyers

By Tammy D. DeRouen

Lafayette Volunteer Lawyers (LVL) is a crucial resource within the community, assisting the needy in solving their legal problems. In an average year, LVL attorneys help more than 400 people navi-



Several attorneys were recognized during the Lafayette Parish Bar Foundation's Champions of Justice Breakfast for their extraordinary pro bono efforts in 2005. From left, Will Montz, Chris Bailey, Greg Koury, Elizabeth Dugal, Shawn Benoit, Biana Chretien, Charlie Hutchens, Sarah Giddens, Richard Mere, Judy Kennedy and Mike Wooderson. Photo provided by Lafayette Parish Bar Association.

How Do I Get Involved in Pro Bono?

Complete the Access to Justice Volunteer Form under the Access to Justice Committee listing on the Louisiana State Bar Association's Web site (www.lsba.org/atj), or see below for agencies statewide seeking the assistance of dedicated volunteers.

Advocacy Center for the Elderly & Disabled

Ste. 2112, 225 Baronne St.
New Orleans, LA 70112
(800)960-7705
Lois Simpson, Director
Ann MacLaine, Contact Person

Acadiana Legal Service Corp. (Main Office)

P.O. Box 4823
Lafayette, LA 70502-4823
(337)237-4320
Toll-free (800)256-1175
Joseph R. Oelkers III, Director

Acadiana Legal Service Corp. (Lake Charles Branch)

Ste. #710, 1 Lakeside Plaza
Lake Charles, LA 70602
(337)439-0377
Joseph R. Oelkers III, Director
Brenda Schexnider, Pro Bono Coord.

ACORN of Louisiana

1024 Elysian Fields Ave.
New Orleans, LA 70117
(504)943-0044, ext. 116
Beth Butler, Director

AIDSLaw of Louisiana, Inc.

2601 Tulane Ave., 5th Flr.
New Orleans, LA 70119
mail: P.O. Box 30203
New Orleans, LA 70190
(800)375-5035
Linton Carney, Director
Iska Beck, Contact Person

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gate their way through the legal system and courts by providing high-quality, pro bono legal assistance and representation.

LVL reaches into the community with three distinct programs: helping victims of domestic violence obtain a Title 46 protective order, providing self-help clinics for parties seeking a divorce, and assisting the homeless in obtaining valid identification. In addition to LVL's community outreach, the program is a referral source for the local LSC agency, Acadiana Legal Service Corp.

LVL is a progressive program with volunteers who are dedicated, compassionate and, most of all, innovative. Through LVL's leadership, the Lafayette Outreach for Civil Justice (LOCJ) campaign was created and raised significant funding to support pro bono efforts in Lafayette Parish for several years. The LOCJ campaign was awarded the ABA's Harrison Tweed Award for its continued dedication to support access to justice for the indigent. Lafayette lawyers are a shining example of how a group of committed people can make a difference in the community in which they reside.

In looking forward, LVL hopes to continue expanding programs and to utilize its resources to best serve its clients. The program is currently researching the possibility of establishing a clinic to assist the elderly in creating wills.

LVL continues to be dedicated to the advancement of the administration of justice and will persist in its objective to help resolve the legal issues of the underprivileged in Lafayette.

• (337)237-4700

Tammy D. DeRouen has served as the coordinator of the Lafayette Volunteer Lawyers for the past two years. She previously worked for 25 years in the insurance business. (P.O. Box 2194, Lafayette, LA 70502-2194)



Judge Jay C. Zainey, right, addressed a group of law students from the University of North Carolina on their first visit to assist The Pro Bono Project (New Orleans) in December 2005. The students will be making their fourth trip to New Orleans from March 12-16. Photo provided by The Pro Bono Project.

The Pro Bono Project (New Orleans)

By Rachel Piercey

As a service provider, The Pro Bono Project (PBP) is challenged to remain responsive to the community's needs in this post-Katrina environment by innovating ways to leverage the diverse talent and resources available. Over its 20 years of service, the PBP has expanded its range of services and its geographic scope through outreach and leveraging volunteer resources. As an organization dependent upon volunteers for the delivery of services, the PBP must balance the needs of the community with the needs and interest of its greatest resource, the volunteers. More than 1,600 lawyer volunteers served on the pro bono panel pre-Katrina and close to 20,000 cases were handled by the PBP. While the need for legal services has skyrocketed, the capacity of the local legal services system to respond has been severely crippled. The traditional base of support from the local bar and long-standing volunteers has been significantly impacted as most

are juggling increased personal and professional demands in this current environment.

While clients vary in age, race and ethnic background, one constant remains the same: an absolute need for pro bono civil legal services. The legal needs in post-Katrina New Orleans are even greater. Through outreach, staffing clinics and telephone intake, it is evident that low-income people have a myriad of civil legal needs directly related to or exacerbated by the social dislocation caused by the storm. Since the storm, FEMA appeals, family law, custody, evictions, bankruptcy and consumer-related matters, successions, special needs trust and insurance matters represent increasing problematic areas.

Coordination with out-of-state resources is particularly crucial now that local resources are limited. In an effort to broaden its volunteer base, the PBP has responded and become the "go-to" resource on all matters related to optimizing the utilization of out-of-state lawyers, including ongoing outreach and communication. Since mid-December 2006, the PBP has been assisted and visited by out-of-state lawyers and law

students representing a wide variety and number of schools and states. It is anticipated that these activities will continue in 2007 and beyond to effectively serve the community.

Post-Katrina, the PBP was further stressed by losing staff due to displacement, relocation or reduced funding streams and is currently struggling to replace capacity. Staff is supplemented by two AmeriCorp attorneys funded by a special grant from Equal Justice Works. Their duties include expansion of the bankruptcy and family law services. During their tenure, the AmeriCorp attorneys are expected to develop and implement models that will return to the volunteer panel as volunteers become trained and available. The additional support through Equal Justice Works has provided the PBP with the resources to shift to a hybrid model of staff and volunteer attorneys while addressing the community's increasing legal needs and stabilizing the volunteer base. Coordination of the implementation and development of programs with other service providers, both local and national, is critical in addressing continued post-Katrina legal needs arising as the com-

munity rebounds from the aftermath.

Over the years, the PBP has responded and expanded by stepping up to the plate, driven by the goal of being viewed as a community resource. Katrina tested The Pro Bono Project's flexibility, but The Project continues to be responsive to these needs, while maintaining and developing relationships to engage and leverage the legal community's resources.

• (504)581-4043

Rachel Piercey has served as the executive director of The Pro Bono Project for the greater metropolitan New Orleans area since the organization's inception in 1986. Her current role is an extension of more than 30 years of community and social services work within the greater metropolitan area. She was the 1994 recipient of the National Association of Pro Bono Coordinators' Pro Bono Coordinator of the Year Award. She also serves as a program consultant for the ABA's Center for Pro Bono consulting project. (Ste. 201, 615 Baronne St., New Orleans, La 70113)



Several pro bono liaisons from New Orleans law firms gathered to discuss the needs of The Pro Bono Project (New Orleans). Photo provided by The Pro Bono Project.

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Baton Rouge Bar Foundation Pro Bono Project

P.O. Box 2241
Baton Rouge, LA 70821
(225)344-4803
R. Lynn Haynes and Rebecca Myhand,
Pro Bono Coordinators

Capital Area Legal Services Corp.

200 North Third St.
Baton Rouge, LA 70801
(225)387-5173
Toll-free (800)256-1900
James A. Wayne, Sr., Director
Lisa Lendo, Pro Bono Coordinator

Central Louisiana Pro Bono Project

2015 MacArthur Dr., Bldg. #3
Alexandria, LA 71301
(318)449-9778
Debbie Smith, Program Coordinator

Lafayette Volunteer Lawyers

P.O. Box 2194
Lafayette, LA 70502-2194
(337)237-4700
Tammy D. DeRouen, Director
April Bailey, Pro Bono Coordinator

Legal Aid Bureau

Ste. #401, 3801 Canal St.
New Orleans, LA 70119
(504)488-1548
Kim Dugar-Glass, Director

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Northwest Louisiana Pro Bono Project

By Ruth F. Moore

The Northwest Louisiana Pro Bono Project began 2006 with a family law 5.5-hour CLE for attorney volunteers and a kickoff for the new mentoring program. The project now has 15 new volunteers and 10 mentors.

In April, the Project partnered with the YWCA Family Violence Program to offer protective order training for attorneys, clerks of court and domestic violence counselors. Two attorneys working with protective order cases, Trina Chu and Fiona York, speak languages other than English, a great asset.

In response to the number of evictions in Shreveport City Court, two of the Projects' board members, Mary Winchell and Anna Maria Sparke Keele, developed a public education program called "Renters Rights or How Not to be Evicted." The program was presented in November and will be offered again this



Northwest Louisiana Pro Bono Project attorney volunteer Fiona York at Operation Stand Down, sponsored by HOPE for the Homeless and the Veterans Administration. The lawyers assisted homeless people so they can receive state identification cards and birth cards, necessary items to get into shelters and to receive free meals. Photo provided by Northwest Louisiana Pro Bono Project.

winter and spring. The Project hopes to interest another community organization in partnering for this program to add a budgeting class to assist renters who do not have those skills.

Two long-standing and deserving volunteers, David Rabb, Jr. and Clay Walker, received the Louisiana State Bar Association's Pro Bono Publico Award in June.

The Project is a member of the Northwest Louisiana Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster. The Project wants to organize a "lawyers reserve unit" of volunteers who would be on call in the event of disasters, such as Hurricanes Katrina/Rita.

• (318)221-6283

Ruth Foster Moore has worked for the Northwest Louisiana Pro Bono Project for seven years and has been the director for six years. She is the only full-time employee and there is one part-time assistant. Like most directors of small pro bono projects, she wears all the hats at one time or another, doing everything from administration to client interviews. (Ste. 950, 401 Market St., Shreveport, LA 71101)



Jeffrey Wittenbrink stirred the jambalaya pot for the Baton Rouge Bar Foundation Pro Bono Project's Lawyers Work for Food case placement drive and fund-raiser



Linda Law Clark, left, and Lisa Lendo made jambalaya plate lunches during the Baton Rouge Bar Foundation Pro Bono Project's Lawyers Work for Food event. Both photos provided by the Baton Rouge Bar Association.