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News

Lawyers give \$90,000 to free legal service group

Donation comes from court funds not taken by defendants

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By Staff reports

A Cleveland charity received \$90,000 Thursday night to assist low-income people with legal fees.

The sizable donation from Dworken & Bernstein Co., L.P.A. was a pleasant surprise, said Melanie Shekarian, attorney and director of development at Legal Aid Society of Cleveland.

"It was beyond our wildest dreams," Shekarian said. "It was really generous."

She said the event was well-attended, including by 110 lawyers and judges who now will be able to spread word about the group's goal.

Legal Aid, which serves clients in five counties including Lake and Geauga, provides free legal services to low-income residents who cannot afford an attorney.

The donation is part of Dworken & Bernstein's Ohio Lawyers Give Back, which was founded by the Painesville law firm in April 2007.

Ohio Lawyers Give Back promotes the use of cy pres in class action settlements.

When a class action lawsuit is settled, the plaintiff and the defendant agree to an amount to pay all class members.

However, because many class members have moved, died or can't be found, millions of settlement dollars go unclaimed, said Patrick Perotti of the law firm.

Cy pres, meaning "as nearly as possible," allows a court to direct unclaimed funds to charities or organizations instead of returning those funds to wrongdoing defendants, Perotti said.

Dworken & Bernstein donated about \$500,000 to Legal Aid last summer, Shekarian said.

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