

We Are the Law

I know I'm dating myself, but who out there remembers Live Aid? Farm Aid? We Are the World? And who knows exactly where the money (if any) raised by these events went? I chiefly remember how cool it was to see a bunch of music stars you'd never see in one place singing together, but I was never sure who was helped by their efforts.

Don't get me wrong – I'm not dissing the rock stars. They were doing what they knew how to do, with the goal of helping others. But we, as lawyers, have a huge advantage, because what we know how to do itself helps people. And now we're going to do exactly that, in a very big way. During the final week of October 2009, we the lawyers of the United States will do much more, directly, right here at home, with verifiable results.

The American Bar Association is working with state and local bar associations, such as our own, as well as Legal Services Corporation entities, such as the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland, to identify and provide pro bono legal services between October 25 and 31, 2009, through as many events as possible, to as many people as possible, in as many ways as possible. The ABA has set up a site listing featured events – as well as a continuous count-down clock – at www.probono.net/celebrateprobono/. In addition, the website identifies various local-level "featured events," demonstrating the commitment to pro bono service of lawyers in their own communities across the country.

Here at home, many lawyers already take advantage of our varied opportunities to provide pro bono services to our community. We accept referrals of longer-term representations from the Cleveland Homeless Legal Assistance Program; we participate in Brief Advice and Referral Clinics in cooperation with Legal Aid; we work with artists and arts entities through Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts; we volunteer with the Guardian ad Litem Program. We do a lot.

But Pro Bono Week, October 25-31, 2009, will allow us to do two important things: first, it will provide us with a veritable smorgasbord of different pro bono service opportunities, all in one week; and second, it will provide a wonderful opportunity to showcase the good will of Cleveland's lawyers.

Like so many other things we do, our pro bono commitment can become something that we do by rote – one Clinic per quarter, one long-term representation per year – and we can lose sight of the broader opportunities available out there. And for those who aren't yet engaging in pro bono service, their routine may not seem to allow for the introduction of another activity.

Pro Bono Week can – and I hope it does – shake all of us out of our routine. My personal goal is to participate in at least one clinic or other activity that is separate and different from my usual pro bono activities. I want to know what else is out there. Your goal may be different – perhaps to dip your toe into the pro bono pool for the first time, perhaps to dig deeper into your usual activities – but the variety of activities will, I believe, tempt you.

At press time, we do not have all the pro bono activities for Cleveland's Pro Bono Week identified or scheduled. The website – www.clemetrobar.org – will have more information as we get closer, including sign-up information. Let me identify a few, though, that should pique your interest:

- **Wills for Heroes:** a signature project of the Young Lawyers' Section, this clinic provides wills for members of the armed forces, police officers and firefighters, as well as proving to the lawyers who participate that they know more about wills than they thought they did.
- **Pro Se Divorce Clinic:** a signature project of the Family Law Section, arising out of the Cleveland Homeless Legal Assistance Program, this clinic provides advice and assistance completing forms to qualifying low income persons seeking to obtain a divorce.

Cleveland's lawyers have never sought the spotlight for our ongoing efforts to help those in our community who need our special expertise. But now that it's here, let's not be shy. The opportunity provided by Pro Bono Week, to be part of something larger than ourselves and to point out what we do all year round here in Cleveland, is not to be missed. With the primary goal of providing information to needy people about the programs that we continue to offer the other 51 weeks of the year, let's step up to the microphone this one week and acknowledge that we are proud to be the law in Cleveland. ➔



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