

MEN WITH HOPE TO BRING

Legal Eagles Give Back

At the end of May, a group of local lawyers and judges gathered at the Wyndham Hotel in Playhouse Square for the 2015 Legal Eagles Man of the Year luncheon. The event was hosted by the St. Edward Legal Eagles, a professional group for alumni and parents in the legal community. The crew spent the afternoon sharing their Eagle pride, reminiscing about St. Edward experiences, and, most importantly, celebrating the dedication and accomplishments of members Craig A. Tame '67 and Mark J. Valponi '70.

Tame, who serves the Northern District of Ohio as the Law Enforcement Coordination Manager for the United States Attorney's Office, was presented with the Legal Eagles Stewardship Award. Tame was honored with this award, which is given to a non-lawyer for his contributions to the Northern Ohio legal community, because of his devotion to the administration of justice and faithful service of the citizens of the greater Cleveland area.

Valponi, the Legal Eagles 2015 Man of the Year, is a Partner with the law firm of Taft Stettinius & Hollister LLP, where he is a member of the Labor & Employment and the Litigation groups. His professional career has featured both the public and private practice of law, focusing on litigation and labor relations. As a Legal Eagle, Valponi has been committed to coaching the St. Edward High School Mock Trial team for several years.

These men serve as models of excellence for the St. Edward community and are examples of the Legal Eagles' commitment to the pillar of servant leadership. In recent years, that very dedication has led to an annual group service project and partnership with the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland.

Left: Legal Eagles outside the annual Man of the Year Luncheon. From left to right: Hon. Timothy J. McGinty '69, Immediate Past President Hon. Brendan J. Sheehan '85, President Kevin M. Butler '93, Hon. Terrence O'Donnell '64, Hon. Sean C. Gallagher '73, John F. McCaffrey '79, Treasurer Cornelius J. O'Sullivan '81, John J. Duffy '61, Robert E. Cahill '93, Seminar Chair John A. Grecol '03, and James M. Cain '60.

From its genesis, the St. Edward High School Legal Eagles have been a community-focused organization. The group was formed to foster relationships among St. Edward graduates and parents in the legal profession and has developed into an organization that facilitates service to the greater community.

Founding Legal Eagles member and Ohio Supreme Court Justice Terrence O'Donnell '64 was invited by the late Ed Clark '56 along with retired Cuyahoga County Probate Court Judge John Donnelly '61 to begin coordinating the new group. "We wanted to give an identity to those lawyers from St. Edward who had achieved significant positions in the community," O'Donnell said, "and to let people know that there were lawyers making valuable contributions."

"We've got some great talent in the legal community from St. Edward," he added.

The mission of the St. Edward Legal Eagles is to promote professionalism, advance continuing legal education, assist St. Edward students and the school family, and provide a social setting to allow for the free and collegial exchange of ideas among its members.

"The organization has really grown and prospered," O'Donnell said.



Past President Hon. John J. Russo '83, President Kevin M. Butler '93, and Immediate Past President Hon. Brendan J. Sheehan '85.

trial teams, and present at the school's Annual Estate Planning Seminar. In addition, the group hosts the annual Legal Eagles Man of the Year luncheon each spring, awarding the Legal Eagles Man of the Year award to a lawyer or judge and the Legal Eagles Stewardship Award to a non-lawyer for contributions to the Northern Ohio legal community.

A key player in recent developments for the group is Judge John J. Russo '83, past Legal Eagles president and current Administrative and Presiding Judge for the Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas. "As president of the Legal Eagles, there was an opportunity, I thought, to give back," Russo said.

He mentioned that, even before President Jim Kubacki's administration led the force in re-emphasizing the four pillars of the school's mission, the Legal Eagles were dedicated to faith, excellence, relationships, and servant-leadership. "Whether we knew it when we formed the group, the four pillars truly make up what the Legal Eagles do—that vision has always been the foundation of the St. Edward Legal Eagles."

When Russo was president, he brainstormed with the group's officers about ways to go into the community and carry

out the pillar of servant leadership. The group had been raising money for the 'lost boys' of Sudan and had compiled a directory of St. Edward's legal professionals for community reference, but Russo wanted to push the group to have an even greater impact on the community. "We went to a variety of agencies and asked, 'Can we give back in the form of our time and the ability to use



Legal Eagles Luncheon Chair Bryan P. O'Malley '80 (left) and John B. Erle '80 (right) assist clients at a Legal Aid clinic at the West Side Catholic Center.

our minds and our degrees?" he said.

One of these agencies was the Legal Aid Society of Greater Cleveland. The Legal Aid Society is a private, non-profit law firm that offers legal services to nearly 20,000 low-income individuals in Northeast Ohio each year. The organization has 41 staff attorneys and over 2,500 volunteer lawyers who work to empower clients through legal assistance. The St. Edward Legal Eagles volunteer annually at Legal Aid's brief advice clinics.

Legal Aid's Director of Development and Communications Melanie Shakarian, Esq. explained that there is no civil right to counsel in the United States. "So when people with low income are at risk of losing their home or they're a victim of domestic violence and need a divorce," she said, "they don't have access to help from an attorney, but for these brief advice clinics."

"We only have the resources to help one of every two people who come to Legal Aid for help," Shakarian said. "Our volunteers are crucial; we couldn't do our brief advice clinics in the various neighborhoods without the help of our attorney volunteers."

So the Legal Eagles, driven to serve the community and focus on issues of social justice, reached out and began the partnership with Legal Aid.

"Many of [the Legal Eagles] had actually volunteered on their own with Legal Aid, so they were familiar with the work that we do," Shakarian said. "But having them come together as a group was a great community-building activity for them and, working together as a group, they can actually have a much higher impact on our mission than any one of them helping individually."

"The Legal Eagles volunteering for us at our brief advice clinic is immensely helpful. It fills a void of need in the community for help for low-income people."

Patrick F. Haggerty, Esq. '73 is a partner at the law firm of Frantz Ward and is the chairperson of the Pro Bono Committee on Legal Aid Society's Board of Directors. Haggerty became involved with Legal Aid through a desire to give back. "I had always admired the commitment of the talented Legal Aid lawyers who do so much for the vulnerable population of Northeast Ohio," he said. "These lawyers can work in any law firm in the Cleveland area but they choose to apply their skills and energy to a population which would be completely unserved but for Legal Aid."

Haggerty is glad to see his fellow Eagles in partnership with Legal Aid. "The servant leader concept was not as fully developed at St. Ed's when I was there, but we were always taught that we had a responsibility to help others," Haggerty said. "So, while I am not at all surprised the Legal Eagles have proven so helpful to Legal Aid, I am very proud of their commitment."

For current Legal Eagles President Kevin Butler '93, it is important to continue the group's involvement at the brief advice clinics. "It's a way for those of us who are trained as lawyers to help out in a way that, in the course of our daily lives, we wouldn't be able to help," he said.

At the clinics, 12-15 St. Edward lawyers gather to assist Legal Aid Society clients. "People come with their legal issues in hand," Butler said. "What you're really helping to do is allay some concerns, give them an idea of what their deadlines are, tell them whether or not they need more help, how to get that help, and generally walk them through the beginning part of the legal process."

"It makes us very proud to be graduates and be able to be out serving the community," Butler said. •

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- HON. JOHN J. RUSSO '83

Today, the Legal Eagles participate in a number of events and activities throughout the year. The group, in conjunction with the Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association, presents a year-end Continuing Legal Education course open to all attorneys. They participate in pro bono activities, provide scholarships to St. Edward students, assist in coaching St. Edward mock