ATJ PRO BONO CHAMPION

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Senior Vice President, General Counsel, and Corporate Secretary – Shell Oil Co.

In what kind of work is Shell involved?

Shell is involved in several probono projects.

Working with the Houston Volunteer Lawyers Program, Lone Star Legal Aid, and the United Way, the Shell Legal Department has held a pro bono day of service for the past five years. During our annual pro bono day of service, we provide two basic services. Many of our lawyers participate in a legal advice clinic where they meet with lowincome clients to answer basic legal questions on a wide range of topics while also referring more complex legal needs to the Houston Volunteer Lawyers Program for further representation. The second service we provide is the preparation of a wide array of estate planning documents for low-income residents. Our paralegal and administrative staffs are critically important to these efforts, as they not only assist the lawyers in preparing the documents, but they also serve as translators, notaries, and witnesses when the documents are signed.

Starting in 2008, Shell Legal partnered with an external law firm to join forces to adopt a nonprofit corporation. Together we serve as their legal counsel on a variety of issues.

In addition, we have staffed Legal Advice Clinics sponsored by the Houston Volunteer Lawyers Program at the Veteran's Hospital as well as at community centers in Houston.

Finally, some of our attorneys have taken on individual cases representing, for example, clients who were denied either Social Security benefits or veterans' benefits.



How did Shell become involved in this type of pro bono work?

Although Shell had been active in community and pro bono activities for several years, our commitment increased when the Texas Access to Justice Commission, under Jim Sales' leadership, demonstrated the growing need for pro bono services in Texas and reached out to corporate legal departments to become more involved. At the same time, the Houston Bar Association, in conjunction with the Houston Volunteer Lawyers Program, initiated the Equal Access to Justice Champions Program, which challenged corporate legal departments to become more involved in delivering pro bono services, while also working with corporate legal departments in developing pro bono service opportunities that were better suited for corporate lawyers and corporate legal departments.

What is the most rewarding part of the work?

Helping individuals address their legal needs and seeing the relief on a client's face when they know that help is available or that a problem has been resolved is perhaps the most rewarding part of the work.

Are there any issues that are unique to implementing a pro bono program at a large corporation?

As a large legal department, one of our more difficult issues was, and remains, developing pro bono opportunities where our entire staff can participate. Our pro bono day of service has enabled us to accomplish this objective, and it has typically enabled us to serve more than 100 clients on each of our pro bono service days. However, we continue to look for other opportunities as well.

What can other companies do to become more involved in pro bono efforts?

The need is great, particularly with the economic downturn. Providing pro bono legal service is a way that corporations and corporate legal departments can make a difference in an individual's life while also giving back to their local communities. Relationships should be built with pro bono organizations either in their local communities or at the state and national levels. There are a lot of resources that are available and a variety of rewarding pro bono opportunities that would be of interest to individuals within legal departments. O

For more information about Access to Justice, visit www.texasbar.com and click on "Lawyers Giving Back."