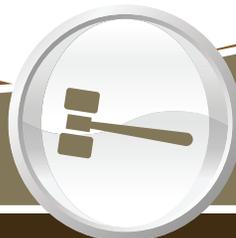




Call of Duty

The Pro Bono College celebrates the attorneys, paralegals, and law students who commit to serving those in need.

BY HANNAH KIDDOO



Tough economic times have amplified the demand for pro bono services, and in Texas and across the nation, attorneys are responding by giving back to those in need—at no cost to clients. This year, 606 Texas lawyers reported that they devoted at least 75 hours of their time to pro bono services. (It is believed that a substantially higher number of attorneys spent at least this amount of time helping others but didn't report their service.)

Oct. 20-26 marks National Pro Bono Celebration week, an annual event that acknowledges attorneys for their volunteer work and spreads word of their services to the public and others interested in serving. Ultimately, the hope is to increase access to justice for all citizens.

While not mandatory, the State Bar of Texas actively encourages its members to participate in some level of pro bono work each year and to report their hours online as they go. Members who far exceed the amount suggested by the bar are invited to join the Pro Bono College of the State Bar of Texas.

In recent years the college introduced branches to recognize paralegals who commit at least 50 hours of pro bono service per year and law school students. The aim of the latter is to encourage students to appreciate the importance of pro bono work while in school and to inspire them to continue serving the indigent throughout their careers. Pro bono work also provides students with an opportunity to learn practical skills.

Attorney members in the college receive free access to the TexasBarCLE online library and discounted registration to the annual Poverty Law Conference, a three-day CLE event focused on issues affecting low-income Texans.

Still, many who do pro bono work consider the idea of helping others in need to be incentive enough. Because the guidelines for defining pro bono work allow members of any specialty to find an opportunity to donate their time, there are a vast number of ways to contribute. Reported volunteer services range from representing a client to counseling a not-for-profit to answering questions at a legal clinic.

No matter the task, pro bono efforts are appreciated.

Just ask Flower Mound attorney Kelly Harrington.

Recognized on the roster of the Pro Bono College since its 1992 creation, Harrington is one of three founding members to reach 20 years of membership in the college. Her work, however, dates back further. Harrington volunteered time to families in need years before her induction, committing time at organized family law pro bono clinics with groups such as the Dallas Women Lawyers Association. After finding the work to be extremely rewarding, Harrington continued to look for opportunities to contribute her services to those in need.

One of Harrington's more memorable pro bono cases resulted in a mother and daughter being able to escape from a sexually abusive partner, giving them new identities—and a new life. "It's self-serving," said Harrington of her work. "It makes your heart glad."

A solo practitioner since 1986, Harrington views pro bono work as an opportunity to tackle the world one problem at a time, and she believes that all lawyers have the responsibility to assist others when they can. "It's something that we can do to make a meaningful difference in somebody's life, even if it's a small thing or a big Braque Du Bourbannaisting," Harrington said. "A lot of people can't afford to hire a lawyer, and for certain people, it's the only way they're going to get any help at all. Knowing that, it's hard to say no."

Although Harrington would like to see all lawyers provide free services to clients in need, she notes that, recognition or not, those who really want to help will. As for Harrington's encouragement to serve? "You always receive when you give. We are in a privileged position, and we have a monopoly on helping people with legal problems. I feel there is a moral obligation."

For more information on the Pro Bono College and to see if you meet the requirements, go to texasbar.com/probono college. **TBJ**



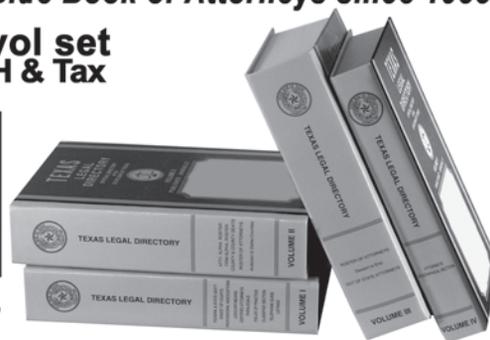
HARRINGTON

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