

# ATJ PRO BONO CHAMPION



## GARY KENNEDY

*General Counsel and Chief Compliance Officer, American Airlines*

Four times a year, the Texas Access to Justice Commissions recognizes an attorney who has made significant contributions to legal aid in Texas. The most recent recipient, **Gary Kennedy**, is no stranger to the hard work and persistence — he recently climbed Mount Kilimanjaro with his daughter — required to make pro bono work a success. Here, Kennedy talks with the *Texas Bar Journal* about his pro bono work.



### **What sort of pro bono work are you involved in?**

We started our in-house pro bono program at American Airlines in 2005. At first, it was a purely voluntary program in a number of different areas. We worked with Legal Aid of NorthWest Texas on various clinics and cases. In 2010, we really institutionalized pro bono work. To be an attorney at American Airlines, you must participate in pro bono work. Ten hours is the minimum requirement, but many of our attorneys end up surpassing that.

### **How did you first become involved in pro bono work?**

At American Airlines, we have always had a substantial involvement in community service. Pro bono and legal aid initiatives are a natural extension of that for the legal department. Personal involvement is key. It's great to support pro bono work, but those in leadership roles should be personally involved, I think. The example goes from the top down.

### **What has been the most rewarding part of your work? Is there one moment that stands out?**

It's all very rewarding, but a couple moments stand out to me. I recently helped a gentleman — someone who, for many years, had been living on the streets. He was trying to get a permanent residence, get his life together, and needed some assistance in a civil matter. He was so thankful for, what was to me, a small service. And I was thankful to be a spoke in the wheel of his recovery.

To take the time for pro bono work is rewarding. There are things that are impossible for our pro bono clients to do for themselves, but for us it's only a few hours of work. For those without knowledge of the law, it can be confusing, intimidating, and expensive to navigate the legal system. We can offer substantial assistance.

### **What advice can you offer in-house counsel or corporate attorneys who want to become more involved in pro bono initiatives?**

In general, I think corporate and in-house lawyers can sometimes be a bit intimidated since most pro bono cases aren't the type of matters they handle on a daily basis. Training can help a lot with this. Once you attend a training seminar, it can give you a real confidence boost. There are so many resources available. We all have a duty and obligation to help others. If we all participate, we can really make a big dent in assisting those who need legal aid. ☺

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