



In the Season of Thanksgiving, Remember to Give Back

Let's reflect on our own good fortune, and not forget the less fortunate. Here are some ways lawyers can help.

Despite the ebb and flow of our personal and professional lives, most of us have much to be thankful for. If we ever have doubts about that, we need only compare ourselves to the many in our society and the world who are less fortunate. During this season of Thanksgiving we should try to be mindful of the positive things in our lives.

There is often debate about whether people's achievements are due to their own hard work, or to good fortune. It is probably a bit of both.

In one sense, bad luck is often just the result of bad judgment. But, those who have good judgment, who are willing and able to work hard, and who have the skills necessary to achieve are typically the beneficiaries of the early and sustained influence of good role models – parents, grandparents, teachers, and the like. They may also be the product of good “genetics.”

As a fundamental matter, we did not “earn” those positive influences, or our gene pool. They were given to us. They were good fortune. Without such a solid foundation, we might not have accomplished much regardless of how hard we tried.

The realization that good fortune has helped us to get where we are in life leads me to believe that we have an obligation to return the favor. As is often said, we will not be judged at life's end by how much we have received, but by how much we have given back. Despite our busy schedules and the demands of our families and our profession, let us resolve during this season of Thanksgiving to give back a little – to others in need, to the profession, and to those who will follow us in our noble profession.

There are many ways to do this. Let me suggest a few.

The ISBA is partnering with the Il-

linois Supreme Court's Commission on Professionalism, the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, the John Marshall Law School, and other groups, to recruit lawyers to undertake the pro bono representation of military veterans in their claims for disability benefits from the federal

Department of Veterans Affairs.

Training is available to those who

are interested in assisting in this project. It is hard to imagine a nobler undertaking than assisting those who volunteered and sacrificed so much for our country. Those of you who are interested in donating some time should visit <http://www.isba.org/operationfairness>. Many thanks to Judge Ron Spears of Taylorville, chair of the ISBA's Commit-

tee on Military Affairs, and to the other members of that committee for their great work on this effort. Thanks, too, to Cheryl Niro, executive director of the Commission on Professionalism, for spearheading the project.

The Committee on Law Related Education and the Task Force on Diversity are organizing an effort to have lawyers and judges participate in law-related education programs across Illinois on a year-round basis. The goal is to have lawyers and judges donate a couple of hours each year to visit schools and participate in pre-approved programs designed to (1) portray lawyers and judges in a positive light, demonstrate the important role they play in our society, and help neutralize negative images of our profession; (2) instill a passion in minority students to pursue careers in the law and help increase diversity in the profession over the next generation; and (3) supplement civic education, in particular by explaining the critical importance of an independent judiciary.

We hope to move this project along over the succeeding months and to solicit volunteers from among our ranks who will spend just one morning or afternoon a year at a local school. I hope that is not too much to ask. Once the programs are in place, we will ask for your help.

There are many other ways to contribute to our profession through

There are so many ways to contribute to our profession and communities through organized bar activities.

organized bar activities. Here are some recent examples.

I attended the McLean County Bar Association Gala in September. More than 100 members of the association were at the Bloomington Center for the Performing Arts to commemorate the 175th anniversary of the practice of law in McLean County.

Earlier that evening, an original oil painting commissioned by the association was unveiled and presented to the McLean County Museum of History (housed in the stately and beautiful former county courthouse) depicting a number of the lawyers who contributed to the storied history of the legal profession's impact on the county. The event was a great example of the importance of maintaining the traditions that strengthen the organized bar and enliven its work into the 21st Century. A good time was had by all.

Many thanks to Darrell Hartweg, the president of the McLean County Bar (and his wife, Donna), prominent member Alan Sternberg (and his wife, Kim),

and fourth district appellate Justice Jim Knecht, who was a featured speaker at the event.

The following week I attended the Fourth Annual Peoria County Bar Association Diversity Luncheon at the Hotel Pere Marquette. The Peoria Bar Association has been at the forefront in promoting diversity in the profession. The annual luncheon, which serves to showcase and solidify its efforts, includes the award of scholarships to minority law students.

The featured speaker, Dean Peter Alexander of SIU School of Law, inspired the over 250 judges, lawyers, and community leaders from all backgrounds who attended. Karen Kendall, president of the Peoria Bar, Clifton Mitchell, chair of the Planning Committee for the luncheon, and Sonni Choi Williams, member of the ISBA Task Force on Diversity and the luncheon planning committee, along with the many other members in attendance, are to be commended for this continuing tribute and contribution

to diversity in our profession and our society.

The traditions and accomplishments of these bar associations, and the many others across the state, are examples of what we can do when we contribute our time and talent and “give back” – the true measure of our life’s work. The spirit of giving is indeed alive and well in the legal profession. Happy Thanksgiving! ■

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