

From the President

A Noble and Caring Profession

By Robert J. Anello

We are made the butt of jokes, identified as a cause for the country's financial woes, and derided as unduly influencing the course of government policy. Often attorneys appear to be disdained by everyone other than a parent who proudly announces that their child has become a "lawyer." Despite this perception of our profession, in my first column as president of the Federal Bar Council, I am happy to announce that I am proud of my fellow lawyers for their contributions to our community.

Contrary to the inaccurate portrayal, lawyers often devote significant portions of their career to public service. Statistics show that attorneys working in the private sector devote considerably more of their time to charitable endeavors than do other Americans. These facts do not surprise me.

No single motivation explains why people choose to practice law with the many other opportunities available. One reason often recounted, however, is the desire to help others. *Perry Mason* offered my generation the prospect of freeing the wrongfully accused by virtue of a well-scripted cross examination of an ill-motivated accuser; younger generations en-

joyed watching justice served on shows like *Law & Order*. Others undoubtedly saw law as a way of fighting to secure individual liberty, a means to protect members of the underclass, or just as importantly, a way to insure that our businesses and institutions continue to prosper by virtue of a well-defined rule of law. Although the natural desire for professional success often appears to obscure these altruistic motivators, the legal community provides many opportunities to pursue our good intentions; thankfully, lawyers do follow through.

Statistics show that attorneys working in the private sector devote considerably more of their time to charitable endeavors than do other Americans.

I am not referring only to the seemingly endless number of functions held to raise funds for worthy causes — some legal and others purely charitable — that vie for our law firms' charitable budget dollars, and provide us the opportunity — perhaps cynically — to mix "giving" with "networking." I am referring to the 73 percent of lawyers who do pro bono work.¹ This number compares overwhelmingly well to the 26.8 percent of the general popu-

lation who do volunteer work.² In fact according to one study, lawyers on the average devote 41 hours annually to pro bono endeavors.³

Many organizations are centered around pro bono efforts. The Pro Bono Institute runs an annual challenge with some of America's largest law firms. Attorneys in participating firms pledge to donate a certain percentage of their hours to pro bono work.⁴ In 2011, 134 firms logged over 4.47 million pro bono hours.⁵ The Pro Bono Partnership, operating in the tri-state area, is one of dozens of organizations throughout the country whose purpose is to match attorneys with pro bono opportunities.⁶ Since their start in 1997, they have worked with 2,800 volunteer lawyers who together have worked on 6,500 legal matters with more than 1,700 non-profit clients. The ABA organizes a National Pro Bono Celebration week every year, where local businesses, legal, and non-profit organizations all over the country create hundreds of events, from workshops and information sessions to walk-a-thons and auctions.

I am also referring to the large number of lawyers who devote their careers working for modest wages for organizations such as Lawyers Without Borders, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, New York Legal Assistance Group, Urban Justice Center, or the Federal Defender's Office. These professionals often chose such careers with the goal of pro-

viding legal services to the underprivileged, or to secure rights or benefits for their constituency. And let us not forget the thousands of lawyers who rise to the challenge of responding to disasters, such as our region's recent hurricane, to provide legal support or good old fashioned sweat to help out people they don't know but still call "neighbors."

I am proud to know and work among you, and to lead an organization that supports these efforts and is committed to doing so in the future. The Federal Bar Council's Public Service Committee is dedicated to meeting the challenges of helping the less fortunate members of society, and has provided valuable contributions to lawyers and organizations that do the same. Under its current incarnation led by its chair Lewis Liman, the committee's work includes programs to train lawyers to engage in numerous pro bono projects, such as assisting asylum seekers and others facing immigration issues, conducting appeals for needy people denied Social Security benefits, and training public interest lawyers on the unique ethical issues they encounter.

Each year the Federal Bar Council celebrates particular members of our profession who have made especially outstanding contributions to public service through the Whitney North Seymour Award, which is given to a private practitioner, and the Emory Backner Award for "outstanding public service." The

recipients of these awards, like others in our profession, didn't undertake their public service to get praised. Rather, they volunteered their time because they perceived a need and felt personally responsible to use their skills to help fill that need.⁷

Lawyers, at three times the rate of the public at large, undertake public and charitable services because that is what their scholarship and hard work gives them the opportunity to do. For the most part, that is why many were motivated to start their legal careers. I encourage my fellow attorneys to take advantage of the pro bono opportunities offered by the Federal Bar Council and the legal community as a whole to use their training and skills to help others. I am proud to be a lawyer, part of an immensely diverse profession that emphasizes giving back to the community, and to be president of an organization that reiterates this message.

Notes

¹ THE ABA STANDING COMMITTEE ON PRO BONO AND PUBLIC SERVICE, *Supporting Justice II: A Report on the Pro Bono Work of America's Lawyers*, 7 (Feb. 2009), available at <http://apps.americanbar.org/legal-services/probono/report2.pdf>.

² News Release, Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Dep't of Labor, Volunteering in the United States — 2011 (Feb. 22, 2012), available at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/volun.nr0.htm>.

³ THE ABA STANDING COMMITTEE ON PRO BONO AND PUBLIC SERVICE,

supra note 1.

⁴ *Law Firm Pro Bono Challenge*, THE PRO BONO INSTITUTE, 1 (2012), available at http://www.probonoinst.org/images/pdfs/law_firm_challenge_2012.pdf.

⁵ *Pro Bono Institute | Year in Review 2012*, THE PRO BONO INSTITUTE, 4 (2012), available at <http://www.probonoinst.org/images/pdfs/pbi-2012-year-in-review.pdf>.

⁶ Stan Schneider & Ira Cutler, *Evaluation of the Pro Bono Partnership*, PRO BONO P'SHIP, 4 (Aug. 2012), available at <http://www.probonopartner.org/FileLib/Documents/probonoevaluationreport.pdf>.

⁷ THE ABA STANDING COMMITTEE ON PRO BONO AND PUBLIC SERVICE, *supra* note 1, at 8.