

MARYLAND BAR ANNOUNCES 2006 PRO BONO SERVICE AWARDS

Once a year, the Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland has the unique privilege of recognizing lawyers, judges, and others in the legal profession for distinguished pro bono service to the community. This year, seven recipients will be awarded the Maryland Pro Bono Service Awards at the Maryland State Bar Association's (MSBA) Annual Meeting in Ocean City on June 17.

Individual Attorney Awards

Ann Baer Cogan, Esq. has been committed to the concept that everyone deserves access to justice since her early days at the Legal Aid Bureau, Inc. in the late 1980's and early 1990's. Ms. Cogan has been a fierce advocate for the un and underserved. For the past three years Ms. Cogan has guided the Harford County Pro Bono Committee in the formulation of a plan to survey the pro bono needs of the citizens of Harford County. Ms. Cogan leads by example and this is nowhere more evident than her commitment to "open the courthouse door" in spite of being a solo practitioner, with school-aged children and many personal community obligations.

It is sometimes hard to know just how many hours **Anu B. Kemet, Esq.** gives in pro bono service because he doesn't always tell the staff he is coming. Since 2001, Mr. Kemet has been showing up 2 or 3 times a week to volunteer his time at the Legal Clinic of the Prince George's County Law Foundation. No fanfare, no spotlights, just helping people with their legal problems. Mr. Kemet finds the time to give back to his community in spite of being a co-founder of Kemet & Hunt, PLLC with a diversified caseload as well as being a popular business lecturer around the nation.

As a first year associate **Sharvari Dalal-Dheini, Esq.** recommended that Saul Ewing LLP establish an asylum project with agency Human Rights First. Ms. Dalal-Dheini assisted in the establishment of the project and with nine other attorneys and a paralegal became the firm's asylum representation team. During 2005, she devoted 222 hours to working pro bono on asylum case work. Through this effort Ms. Dalal-Dheini has become an invaluable resource to firm attorneys working on asylum cases as well as successfully assisting three clients in obtaining asylum status here in Maryland.

Herbert S. Garten Special Project Award

The work began for the law firm of **Reese & Carney, LLP** at the beginning of 2004 and continued throughout that whole year as they fought to save 300 housing units in Columbia in Howard County. They worked in conjunction with Columbia Housing Corporation to save these units that were so desperately needed by the very low income residents in the neighborhood. The attorneys of the firm had to negotiate, coordinate and prepare all the documentation needed to successfully navigate the Byzantine maze of HUD property transfer requirements. By the time the work was finished and the units were safe, Reese & Carney, LLP had logged over 273 hours of partner, associate and staff time.

Law firms

Bregman Berbert Schwartz & Gilday co-counseled with the Legal Aid Bureau and challenged the Governor's Office. In the 2006 budget, Governor Ehrlich's removed medical assistance funding for legal immigrant children and pregnant women who have been in the country less than 5 years. The Circuit Court of Montgomery County granted a preliminary injunction and the case is now before the Court of Appeals. The pro bono work performed by the firm consisted of numerous hours of fast and furious constitutional and statutory case law research as well as litigation, sometimes in multiple forums, simultaneously. Success means life saving benefits to approximately 4,000 families.

Large law firms can have tremendous impact on pro bono work on multiple fronts. However, support must come from the top down and **Saul Ewing LLP** has decided to do just that. In January of 2005 Saul Ewing committed to addressing pro bono needs in their communities by hiring a full time pro bono counsel and supporting her with a committee of partners and associates. The firm-wide effort WE'RE ALL IN is an initiative in which every attorney agrees to provide legal representation to an individual or group who can not otherwise afford it. As a result, in 2005 Saul Ewing attorneys provided over 7,111 hours in pro bono work. Compared to the year before this was an increase of over 200%.

Judiciary

Judges Michael Galloway, J. Barry Hughes and Thomas F. Stansfield of the Circuit Court of Carroll County believe the best manner to improve the practice of family law in Carroll County is to meet with the practitioners face to face. They accomplish this through a series of best practices seminars sponsored by the Maryland Volunteers Lawyers Service. The volunteers receive the training they need and then agree to take a pro bono case through MVLS. These seminars provide an opportunity for the members of the bench to answer questions from practitioners in a neutral setting.

These honorees have worked zealously to help ensure that equal access to justice is a reality for those who would otherwise have slipped through the cracks. The dedication, persistence and compassion exhibited by these determined volunteers set an example for the legal profession.