

President's Page

A Community of Lawyers Contributing to Justice

By Lisa C. Goodheart

The Boston Bar Association has one of the best views in the City, but I'm not talking about the one you'll see from the second story picture windows at the top of Beacon Hill. The more impressive sight is that of a great many lawyers doing good things to promote justice every day. The engagement of so many of our members in community service has always been one of the hallmarks of the BBA. And a big part of what makes the BBA a great organization is the high quality of the meaningful public service opportunities that it provides for members of our legal community. Let me tell you about just a few of those opportunities.

The Public Interest Leadership Program ("PILP") was created nearly a decade ago, out of the shared recognition by Chief Judge Mark Wolf of the federal district court and then-BBA President Michael Keating of the importance of enabling newer lawyers to become more engaged as community leaders earlier in their careers. PILP was launched to enable newer lawyers to deepen their understanding of the meaning of community leadership, while forming new and lasting connections with a like-minded group of colleagues. Each year, a class of PILP participants is chosen through a selective application



process, and each class of “PILPers” works together on public service projects of their choosing. This year, following some thoughtful programmatic refinements, PILP is being re-launched under the able leadership of Kathleen Henry and Darren Braham, both of whom are graduates of the program. PILP will continue to assemble diverse groups of newer lawyers, who are committed to collaborating on pro bono and public service work and serious about developing their own leadership potential. When they graduate from the 14-month program, they will join a network of alumni who mentor and support their successors. Please consider whether there is a newer lawyer who would benefit from your encouragement to apply for a spot in the next PILP class, and consider applying yourself if you are eligible for this unique public service opportunity.

The youth of the City of Boston are a particular focus of several BBA community service initiatives. Our summer jobs program, for example, clearly reflects this focus. Through this program, participating law firms and legal departments provide a diverse group of outstanding students from the Boston public high schools with invaluable exposure to the legal profession in the form of 8 weeks of summer employment. Our Law Day program in the Boston public schools is likewise aimed at our city’s youth. For the Law Day program, volunteer attorneys go into elementary, middle and high schools in all the different neighborhoods of Boston, highlighting the rule of law and planting seeds of interest in the legal profession. Our members’ commitment to young people is also demonstrated through the M. Ellen Carpenter Financial Literacy Program, which is run by the BBA’s Bankruptcy Law Section in partnership with the U.S. Bankruptcy Court. This program teaches high school students in Boston and across Massachusetts about the importance of making informed and effective decisions regarding their finances. Volunteer lawyers provide the students with very practical information about checking accounts, payroll information, tax deductions, budgeting, credit cards, buying a car and the

consequences of poor financial management. For many, these critical practical lessons might not otherwise be learned.

Our members also serve the community by direct participation in public policy advocacy. We make a positive difference by showing up and speaking out in support of broad access to justice and the sound administration of justice. The BBA offers a number of organized opportunities for advocacy, often in partnership with legal service organizations, other bar associations and the courts. The Annual Walk to the Hill for Legal Services is one such an opportunity. This year, some 700 lawyers rallied at the State House to support increased funding for civil legal aid for the poor, highlighting the importance of the legal safety net on which our most vulnerable fellow citizens must depend for protection of their most basic rights. More recently, on Court Advocacy Day, members of the legal community gathered again at the State House, this time to support the third branch of our state government by reminding the lawmakers who determine court budgets that “the judiciary is not a state agency whose capacity to function can expand or contract depending on changes in public policy and available resources,” as stated the BBA’s 2011 report, *Justice on the Road to Ruin*. Lawyers have a special understanding of the importance of a high-quality court system, and a corresponding obligation to highlight the consequences of sustained underfunding of our courts. Court Advocacy Day offered an important opportunity to meet that obligation, and others will follow.

To me, the essence of being a member of the BBA is being a part of a great community. There is a real energy and a genuine commitment that is apparent in our members’ efforts to serve the public interest. Please take a look. What you will see are many ways to contribute to justice – including but extending well beyond the few I’ve mentioned here. Please get involved. Your participation is important, and you will definitely make a difference. ■