

CELEBRATE PRO BONO WEEK—2009

PRO BONO LAWYERS MAKE A HUGE DIFFERENCE

by Nita Taylor,
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New Mexico attorneys jumped on board to make the first annual *Celebrate Pro Bono Week* a remarkable success—resulting in hundreds of lawyers across the state contributing their time to ensure many of New Mexico’s low income population received free legal assistance for domestic violence, consumer debt, landlord tenant issues and many more.

This statewide event, held October 25 through 31, was part of a coordinated national effort to showcase the great difference that pro bono lawyers make to the nation, to our great state, its system of justice, its communities and, most of all, to the clients they serve.

Through the oversight of New Mexico’s Access to Justice Commission, co-chaired by Justice Petra Jimenez Maes and Sarah Singleton, each of New Mexico’s judicial districts had already formed pro bono committees that tailored their programs to best address both the type of legal needs and the type of assistance their local attorneys are able to give. These committees focused on developing unique opportunities for lawyers and low income population in need of legal assistance during pro bono week. Sixteen local pro bono committees representing all thirteen judicial districts planned and implemented public events across the state with one or more Supreme Court justices or Court of Appeals judges visiting each location.

Highlights of the Week

Free public legal information seminars and one-on-one consultations were provided in Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Las Cruces, Las Vegas, Roswell, Carlsbad, Hobbs, Silver City, Socorro, Portales, Gallup, Ruidoso and Alamogordo.

The 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 6th Judicial Districts hosted large multi-topic legal fairs that provided general information to a number of attendees and private consultations to individuals throughout the event. While the tally is not final, Judge Clay Campbell, chair of the 2nd Judicial District, reports that during the two Law-La-Palooza legal fairs nearly 200 low-income customers were served by 33 attorneys, 12 legal services providers, 30 or more UNM law students and others. (See “It Was a Law-La-Palooza” by Judge Clay Campbell in the Nov. 16 [Vol. 48, No. 46] *Bar Bulletin*.)

Judge Fernando Macias, co-chair of the 3rd Judicial District, also reports overwhelming success during the Las Cruces Free Legal Help Day, with 25 one-hour seminars presented by 23 attorneys or judges and 147 private consultations given by 32 volunteer attorneys. As a result, 300 persons left the court that day with information and assistance about their legal problems. The Las Cruces team estimates the legal help provided would equate to an estimated \$40,400 of billable hours.

(continued on next page)



A FEW OF THE 335 ATTORNEYS RECOGNIZED FOR PRO BONO EFFORTS



Judge Eugenio Mathis, chair of the 4th Judicial District Pro Bono Committee.



Fred Tharp, Portales



Bobbie Franklin, Gallup



Bill Brogan, Alamogordo



Mike Lilley directs traffic for 300 clients and 55 volunteers at the Celebrate Pro Bono Week in Las Cruces.

Pro Bono Week continued

Two continuing legal education courses, each generating one professionalism credit for \$1, were developed specifically for the week.

Sarah Singleton developed and traveled the state to present *Professionalism Presentation in Honor of Pro Bono Week* to over 230 attorneys, while Judge Drew Tatum presented the same program to attorneys in the 9th Judicial District. Janay Haas of New Mexico Legal Aid developed and presented *Pro Bono on Purpose* to 67 attorneys in the 5th Judicial District. Sponsored by the State Bar of New Mexico and the Chaves County Bar respectively, these programs were presented to a collective 320 attorneys in Las Cruces, Farmington, Gallup, Las Vegas, Portales, Santa Fe, Taos, Carlsbad, Roswell and Hobbs.

Pro Bono Attorney Recognition. New Mexico Supreme Court justices and Court of Appeals judges traveled the state to celebrate with pro bono attorneys. In recognition of attorney pro bono efforts, over 335 Supreme Court Certificates of Appreciation were awarded to those attorneys identified by the local pro bono committees as having gone above and beyond the call of duty.

“Access to Justice is a fundamental and essential right in a democratic society,” said Chief Justice Edward L. Chávez who participated in pro bono celebrations in Las Vegas and Taos. “With over 20 per cent of New Mexicans qualifying for legal services and the poverty rate on the rise during this recession, pro bono services are critical to providing low income individuals the representation they require to gain access to justice and protect their rights and liberties. Over half of New Mexico attorneys reported donating a total of nearly 250,000 pro bono hours in 2008. We applaud those lawyers who, by donating their time, have made a real difference in the lives of many New Mexicans. I encourage each lawyer in New Mexico to participate year-round in pro bono assistance. Our republic cannot be a complete democracy if its poorest citizens are effectively denied access to its system of justice.”

Justice Maes attended ceremonies in Roswell, Carlsbad and Hobbs.

Justice Richard C. Bosson joined the festivities in Grants and Gallup.

Justice Patricio M. Serna offered remarks to attorneys in Socorro, Silver City, Las Cruces and Alamogordo.

Justice Charles W. Daniels attended a recognition luncheon in Portales.

Judge Linda Vanzi joined the teams in Santa Fe and Farmington.

Judge Robert Robles celebrated in Albuquerque and Las Cruces.

Judge Tim Garcia traveled to Tucumcari and Las Cruces.

These gifts of time from the esteemed members of New Mexico’s highest courts firmly define their level of support in developing and maintaining strong pro bono programs that will enable attorneys to participate in this critical effort.

Across the state, hundreds of attorneys, plus other partners such as paralegals, law students, members of the legal service organizations and judges, helped in providing free legal help to many of New Mexico’s low income population.

A most sincere *thank you* goes to every person who contributed to this amazing celebration. Our continued goal is to capitalize on the energy and momentum generated in each of our communities to keep the Celebration of Pro Bono going all year.



Judge Timothy Garcia recognizes Katherine Blackett in Las Cruces.



Sarah Singleton presents a CLE program, *Professionalism Presentation in Honor of Pro Bono Week*, to attorneys in Farmington.



(Top) Beth Lindsey receives a Certificate of Appreciation from Justice Charles Daniels in Portales.

(Right) Judge Fernando Macias, co-chair of the 3rd Judicial District Pro Bono Committee, recognizes pro bono attorneys.

