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Pro Bono Spotlight

David B. Fawcett Pro Bono Award winners far exceed firm's pro bono minimum



David B. Fawcett Pro Bono Award winners Jeffrey Hantz (seated) and Christopher Lovato provided pro bono representation for a special needs child in a guardian ad litem case.

by Susan Jacobs Jablow

Last year, the law firm of Dickie, McCamey & Chilcote, P.C., which is known for its dedication to pro bono work, instituted an annual David B. Fawcett Pro Bono Award to honor associates who go above and beyond the firm's required 12 hours of pro bono service each year. Jeffrey Hantz and Christopher Lovato, associates with the firm, received the award on March 21.

The award is named for David B. Fawcett, a long-time attorney and shareholder who was known for his devotion to pro bono causes. In the late 1960s, Fawcett was a founder of Neighborhood Legal Services, which offers free legal advice and representation in civil matters. He was also a judge on the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas in 1969-70, and was president of the Allegheny County Bar Association in 1965.

Sadly, Fawcett passed away on April 14. He had remained active as an attorney at Dickie McCamey in the days before his death, and set an example for attorneys about the importance of pro bono work.

"It was an honor to work with him," said Hantz.

Lovato agreed, and said that Fawcett's example was inspiring.

Both Hantz and Lovato far exceeded their firm's annual 12-hour pro bono minimum. They estimate they devoted in excess of 100 hours to pro bono work in the last year, much of which was spent preparing for a trial at which they represented a young boy as his guardian ad litem.

"They were co-counsel on a very extensive and difficult case," said William Clifford, a shareholder in the firm who is also a leader of the pro bono committee. Together, Hantz and Lovato head Dickie McCamey's protection from abuse program. They work with Neighborhood Legal Services, and when lawyers are needed to represent victims of abuse, they find volunteers from their firm, or volunteer themselves for the job.

In the guardian ad litem case, Hantz and Lovato represented a child with special needs whose parents were unable to agree upon custody arrangements. They were able to help facilitate a situation that benefited the child.

To determine the Fawcett award winners, Clifford said the firm considers the number of hours the person has volunteered, feedback from the

organizations served, and the number of times the person has volunteered, among other factors. Of course, the associates must also keep up with all of their work for paid clients at the same time. Despite all of the requirements, associates at the firm typically complete at least 50 hours of pro bono work a year. Even in this environment, Hantz and Lovato stood out for their devotion to pro bono work.

"They provide leadership to younger associates on how to handle these cases, and they volunteer to handle a substantial number of cases," said Clifford. "They are both stellar associates of ours."

Barbara Griffin, Pro Bono Coordinator for the Allegheny County Bar Foundation, agreed. "As legal aid organizations face funding and staff cuts, the work of pro bono attorneys like Chris and Jeff is becoming more important than ever," she said. "Pro bono at Dickie McCamey is more than just a program or a project or something that's available to do. It is obviously now part of the firm's culture."

For Hantz, Dickie McCamey's involvement in pro bono work was an important consideration in choosing to work at the firm. "It is very important for the firm and me personally," he said.

Lovato said he is inspired by leaders at Dickie McCamey, including Clifford, who remain devoted to pro bono work in addition to their regular clients. "Most people in our profession are fortunate," he said. "It's important to realize the benefits we have and to be able to give back." ■