

Pro Bono Visionary Honored for Dedication to Help Others

Nothing ever seems to slow down attorney David B. Fawcett. Celebrating his 60th year with Dickie, McCamey & Chilcote (DMC), the Shaler Township resident decided to forego retirement and continues to practice law to this day.

While Fawcett's long list of accomplishments is amazing—president of both the Allegheny County Bar Association and Pennsylvania Bar Association, member of the American Bar Association's House of Delegates, a brief stint as Court of Common Pleas Judge—most colleagues and peers in the legal community will always remember him as being one of the first true crusaders for pro bono service.

In 1966, Fawcett helped to start the Neighborhood Legal Services Association (NLSA) which offers free civil legal services for those struggling to make ends meet. Back then, the creation of NLSA was the legal community's response to the landmark United States Supreme Court ruling requiring that anyone accused of a crime was constitutionally entitled to proper legal representation.

"That led many lawyers and leaders of the county bar association to rightfully conclude that if criminal indigents are entitled to proper, legal representation, then law-abiding civil indigents should likewise have representation," says Fawcett. "Lawyers stand for fairness and justice. We're professional people and we have an obligation to support the less fortunate."

Allegheny County was one of the first counties in the country that was appropriated funds from the federal government so that NLSA could be established to properly represent indigent persons in civil matters. After government funding was slashed in the early 1980s, the Allegheny County Bar Association took control of NLSA and many law firms donated funds and attorneys to allow it to continue.

"When the funding was cut, there became a greater need for a more organized pro bono effort from the law firms," says attorney Bill Clifford who helped create a formal Pro Bono Program at DMC several years ago. "That was when the evolution of pro bono really started, and the legal community began to supplement what NLSA and other programs were doing."

Fawcett was also instrumental in helping to form the Pittsburgh Pro Bono Partnership, a collaboration of 32 law firms and corporate and government legal departments and associations dedicated to providing and expanding legal services to low-income constituencies. The partnership was formed in 2001. In

2009, the participants contributed more than 25,000 hours of pro bono service.

A large part of his personal crusade was to also convince other lawyers to follow his lead.

"You're trained to help people," says Fawcett when asked why he has remained so dedicated to pro bono work. "That's what lawyers are supposed to do. And when you're asked to do something, I think that you are duty-bound to do it. The trouble with the situation today is that many lawyers work at big firms, and it's difficult for them to understand that they have an obligation other than to their employer. Sometimes, they forget that they are members of an honored profession that has an obligation to something other than the routine work they are being paid for."

Linda Hernandez, another attorney with DMC, says that there is an exponential benefit for the attorneys who are doing pro bono work.

"A lot of small wins that add up to something greater," she says. "I grew up in a time when being a lawyer was a noble profession because it was a powerful profession. Through my pro bono work, I learned that lawyers can still systematically change systems for the better, not just for our clients."

Since the need for legal assistance has become greater over the years, DMC formed its own internal Pro Bono Program.

"No matter how many pro bono programs are in place around the region, it just scratches the surface," says Clifford. "The capacity for human beings to inflict misery on others makes me so awestruck. The need has always outstripped our supplies, so we're always under water."

While most lawyers understand their obligations to fill that need, Clifford says that the firm felt that it was important to become more organized in those efforts and be more efficient in providing those services.

"By formalizing a pro bono program, we're able to do that," he says. "We can mobilize people and be efficient with the delivery of the services. The idea is nothing new. It's just how it has evolved, and the need has just exploded."

At DMC, all lawyers in the firm are encouraged to do pro bono service. In fact, its associates are now required to complete a minimum number of hours per year of pro bono work through one of three different opportunities at the firm:



David Fawcett

- Represent plaintiffs on Protection From Abuse cases on behalf of NLSA
- Volunteer at its Millvale Legal Clinic once a month
- Represent children involved in high risk custody cases through the Custody Guardian Ad Litem program

Associates and partners are also encouraged to find their own pro bono project to work on, pending the committee's approval. For DMC attorney Doug Grimsley, it's this dedication to pro bono service that distinguishes DMC from other firms.

"Our track record sets us apart, and we continue to lead in this area," he says. "Dave Fawcett's record is amazing based upon what he has accomplished throughout his career. Every lawyer from young to seasoned can look up to him. What strikes me is that he continues to lead. He's still here to help mentor and guide even though he's already done so much for the firm."

Jeff Hantz, one of DMC's Pro Bono Program committee members, agrees.

"Dave Fawcett is one of the best teachers we have at the firm. He is always one to look after the young attorneys. It gives everyone in the firm an example of what they want to be as an attorney and not just in pro bono work."

To honor Fawcett's dedication and commitment, DMC has instituted a Pro Bono award, named after Fawcett—the David B. Fawcett Pro Bono Award—for the associate who best exemplifies the following criteria:

- Number of pro bono hours
- Testimonials/recommendations from program coordinators
- Results
- Frequency of volunteering
- Testimonials/recommendations from supervising shareholder if the associate is working on pro bono work outside of main programs
- Consistency of commitment—shown by dates and time spent
- Willingness to cover when volunteers have unforeseen circumstances
- Pro bono committee work
- Representation of DMC on Bar Association/other outside pro bono organizations
- Initiating new pro bono opportunities for DMC
- Ability to generate interest in pro bono among partnership and other associates
- Satisfaction of all non-pro bono requirements of an associate at the firm

"I'm honored, pleased and happy about the award being named after me," says Fawcett. "I'm extremely honored that this wonderful recognition bears my name."

The award was presented at the offices of DMC during a special ceremony on March 22, 2011. This year's recipient was Douglas Grimsley, a member of the firm's Commercial Law and Litigation Group, Product Liability Group, and Corporate Services Group.

In addition to serving on the Pro Bono Committee, Grimsley is also the co-chair of DMC's Government Contracting and Compliance Group. He concentrates his practice in the areas of commercial law and product liability law, with a particular emphasis in commercial litigation.

Clifford says the award, which comes with a monetary donation to the awardee's charity of choice, was created not only to honor Fawcett but to also serve as an inspiration to all of its attorneys.

"Like anything else in an organization, unless the leadership buys into it and models it, it's hard to get your people to do it," says Clifford. "With this award, we are telling our attorneys, that this is one of the most important things that we do. We modeled it and dedicated it to Dave because of his history of doing it."



Douglas Grimsley

He adds, "As a firm, we want our younger attorneys to know how important we believe this to be and put a focus on it. We also believe that this is an excellent opportunity for our younger lawyers to gain some real courtroom and client experience that they might otherwise receive. It's a great training tool."

Christina Freeman, an associate with DMC and member of the Pro Bono Committee, says that her pro bono work provided her with invaluable experience as well as an opportunity to make a difference in someone's life.

"I think at times you don't realize how much our efforts really mean to our clients," she says. "When you receive a phone call from them saying how much they appreciate your help, that goes a long way and it makes you want to continue those efforts. For us they may not be grandiose, but it's huge for our clients."

Fawcett is encouraged, not only by his firm but the work of other law firms in their pro bono initiatives, and sees hope that many attorneys will continue to carry that torch.

"This is the groundwork, and good things spread," he says. "This annual award gives an opportunity for those who don't normally participate to hopefully see the benefits of participating. The more you are exposed to good things, the more likely you are to have more participants."

Clifford expects to see other law firms follow DMC's lead and create their own internal pro bono programs.

"In my lifetime, pro bono will be a required activity for lawyers," he says. "We think we're way ahead of the curve. Through pro bono work, you can touch people's lives in very small ways that make huge differences."

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