

# Celebrate Pro Bono During October

Celebration is the goal during the ABA's Celebrate Pro Bono week – October 20-26. ABA Immediate Past President Laurel Bellows issued the challenge this way: “It is essential that the entire legal community engage in conversation and action that results in equal access to justice for all. The energy generated by the National Pro Bono Celebration is a powerful force that helps us build a just legal system.”

With only four years of history, Celebrate Pro Bono has grown and become a week dedicated to recognizing the work of pro bono attorneys and creating awareness of the continued need for equal access to justice.

As Kansans take up the chorus and celebrate, just what is there to celebrate?

Some facts:

- 150 Kansas attorneys will volunteer more than 3,500 hours to meet the legal needs of 749 low-income Kansans in 2013.
- Challenging them for biggest contributor honors, 3,300 hours will be donated by law students and other volunteers.
- In family law, the area of highest need, 170 cases were handled by volunteer attorneys.
- The Kansas Supreme Court modified court rules to allow retired and inactive lawyers to volunteer through programs like Kansas Legal Services and law school clinics.
- Many Kansas lawyers supplement volunteer efforts by making a donation to Kansas Legal Services or the Kansas Bar Foundation, designated to KLS.
- The Kansas Elder Law Hotline, matching attorneys with senior citizens in need of legal advice or information, has operated continuously since 1996. KBA members who provide legal services for the hotline are given free membership to the KBA Lawyer Referral Service for their first volunteer year.

Here is just a sample of some of the events that will take place to put a spotlight on pro bono.

- KLS has document preparation clinics planned across the state. For example, Kansas City will be hosting three clinics.
- October 17, Leavenworth Council on Aging
- October 22, Wilhemina Gill Multipurpose Center to provide outreach to the homeless, at-risk, and community service participants.
- October 25, Heartland Habitat for Humanity
- KBA representatives will address attendees at the Kansas Sheriff Association (KSA) fall conference in Hutchinson in November. The session is designed to provide first responders with information on the importance of having advanced directives in place and to provide information about resources for estate planning. This will also take place at the SAMS (Sheriffs Administrative Management School) conference in Topeka in January.
- Washburn law students have volunteered to help coordinate a Jeans for Justice Day event to raise money for pro bono services. Participants in the event will be able to make an online donation through the Kansas Bar Founda-

tion and proceeds will be distributed to programs that support pro bono services.

## Encouraging law students to get involved ...

The Pro Bono Program at Washburn University School of Law plans to Celebrate Pro Bono with several events. During a panel discussion, attorneys will share their experiences providing pro bono service and discuss how those experiences have helped shape their careers. In addition, several students plan to participate in community document assembly events planned in conjunction with Celebrate Pro Bono Week, and the student Pro Bono Society will assist the KBA in recognizing pro bono efforts by individual attorneys. The events are organized under the auspices of the Washburn Law Pro Bono Program, of which one key component is the Pro Bono Honors Program. Students at the University of Kansas School of Law will also have an opportunity to attend a panel discussion this fall. The major subject will be whether pro bono should be mandatory both for law students and lawyers.

“As our economy struggles to regain traction, I am proud that our students are providing access to justice to the many underserved individuals in our community,” said Margann Bennett, director of professional development and pro bono at Washburn University School of Law. “In addition to Kansas Legal Services, some of the organizations that benefited from our students’ efforts include VITA, CASA, Colorado Legal Services, Shawnee County Corrections, Washburn Law Clinic (interpreting), Legal Services of the Virgin Islands, and the Kansas Judicial Counsel.”

Students in the Washburn Law Pro Bono Program Class of 2013 contributed more than 1,400 hours of pro bono service. The program pairs students with legal providers to improve access to justice and rewards those students at graduation for their contributions. Students who complete at least 50 hours are awarded Pro Bono Honors and those who complete at least 100 hours are awarded Distinguished Pro Bono Honors. Additionally, many students work on service activities either through the Washburn Law Clinic or as part of an academic certificate program. Through traditional pro bono service, the clinic, and certificate requirements, Washburn Law students make a significant contribution to the community.

## Why are volunteers needed?

With no constitutional guarantee of counsel, those with civil legal problems are at the mercy of the resources available to meet their needs. Those needs far outstrip the services available from staff at KLS, despite the efficiency and best efforts of that program. Volunteer attorneys can extend those resources, drawing on KLS staff to screen clients and to provide pleadings and other technical assistance. Interested volunteers can be involved in special projects, including community document assembly events or by taking calls from their office on the Elder Law Hotline. Monthly online newsletters publicize cases that are waiting to be matched with a volunteer. You can learn more and get the volunteer application on the pro bono page of the KLS website at [www.kansaslegalservices.org](http://www.kansaslegalservices.org).

## Diversity Committee Happenings

By Eunice C. Peters, Kansas Office of Revisor of Statutes, Topeka, [Eunice.Peters@rs.ks.gov](mailto:Eunice.Peters@rs.ks.gov)

This year, Christi L. Bright and Eunice C. Peters will be serving as co-chairs of the KBA Diversity Committee. The Diversity Committee is comprised of practicing and non-practicing attorneys throughout the state of Kansas who are members of the KBA. Our mission is to help the KBA foster an inclusive, diverse bar association, promote understanding and respect for different points of view, and support the advancement of diversity within the Kansas legal profession and justice system.

In supporting the KBA this year, we are excited to host the following events planned by our committee.

First, our committee members author “The Diversity Corner,” which is a monthly column in the *KBA Journal*. It is through this medium that we are given the opportunity to voice our perspectives on diversity issues in the Kansas legal community. Past articles have covered topics, such as the meaning behind diversity and inclusion, “diversity fatigue,” the economics of diversity, race and the attorney-client relationship, disability as a diversity classification, and many other diversity-related issues.

Second, due to our success in 2013, our committee will host the second annual “Career Crossroads” in April 2014 in Wichita. This speed networking event matches seasoned attorneys with those who have two to five years’ experience on a one-on-one basis with the goal of assisting newer attorneys with developing their legal careers. Last year, we paired twenty seasoned attorneys with twenty newer attorneys. If you would like to attend this event, please contact either of the chairs. Space will be limited.

Please also let us know if you would like to sponsor or collaborate with our committee on this event. We would be happy to work with you so we can provide this worthwhile experience to our legal community!

Third, members from our committee will present a diversity-related CLE at the 2014 KBA annual meeting. Those attending will receive ethics and professionalism credit under the professionalism umbrella. As a reminder, professionalism includes the “promotion of diversity and inclusion of minorities in the legal profession, including but not limited to race, religion, color, sex, disability, national origin or ancestry, familial status, sexual orientation, and gender identity” for the general goal of creating “a forum in which lawyers, judges and legal educa-

tors can explore and reflect upon the meaning and goals of professionalism in contemporary legal practice.” (<https://www.kscl.org/pdf/GuidelinesForEthicsAndProfessionalism.pdf>) Past CLEs have covered subjects, such as the building diversity in the legal profession, identifying cultural bias and awareness in court, women of color in the law, inclusion practices, and other ethics and professionalism-related issues.

Fourth, our committee members try to attend diversity-related functions hosted by other organizations in Kansas. By working together, we can make the legal profession fully reflect the communities we serve. In the past year, our members have attended the Legal Diversity Picnic, the Asian American Bar Association of Kansas City’s Seventh Annual Dinner, KWAA’s Annual Lindsborg Conference, the KU Law Diversity Banquet, and various other events. Please let us know of any upcoming diversity-related events in the area, and we will try to be there to support your organization.

Last, our committee will be proposing definitions for the terms of “diverse” and “inclusive” to the KBA Board of Governors for their approval. Once approved, we will include those definitions on the website and other relevant materials.

We are excited to have so many energetic members on our committee this year! If you are interested in becoming a member of the Diversity Committee, please contact either chair for more information. The Diversity Committee generally meets every first Wednesday of the month by conference call and occasionally in person. ■

### About the Author



*Eunice Chwenyen Peters is an assistant revisor for the Kansas Office of Revisor of Statutes. She is co-chair of the KBA Diversity Committee, a member of the KBA Awards Committee, and a member of the Kansas Supreme Court-Kansas Bar Association Joint Commission on Professionalism. She received her juris doctorate from Washburn University School of Law in 2006 and her bachelor’s degree from the University of Illinois in 1997.*

## Celebrate Pro Bono During October

Each year, the KBA recognizes an attorney with the Pro Bono Award. That award recognizes a lawyer or law firm for the delivery of direct legal services, free of charge, to the poor or, in appropriate instances, to charitable organizations whose primary purpose is to provide other services to the poor. This year’s award was presented to Joni J. Franklin. In addition to the Pro Bono Award, the KBA awards a number of Pro Bono Certificates of Appreciation. Visit <http://www.ksbar.org/?probono> to read more about Pro Bono awards.

“From the young lawyer who spends a couple hours on the phone to the senior attorney who volunteers every week, once [www.ksbar.org](http://www.ksbar.org)

people have tried pro bono work, they usually return,” said Marilyn Harp, KLS executive director. “Why? It can be rewarding and stimulating. Just ask the many volunteers who we celebrate during pro bono week. While you are at it, tell them thanks for making justice a reality.”

At whatever stage of a legal career, you can be a part of the celebration as a pro bono volunteer.

For more information, contact Anne Woods, [awoods@ksbar.org](mailto:awoods@ksbar.org). ■