

Renewal and Replenishment in 2010: The Richard Steinberg Memorial Treatment Fund

By Martha D. Burkett

“Year’s end is neither an end nor a beginning but a going on, with all the wisdom that experience can instill in us.”

—Hal Borland

Here we are, one year ending and another beginning, and the questions facing us are: What will we do with the year ahead? How will we live our lives? The past is done, but what choices can we make that will help bring a brighter future for all this year and the next and the next? What have we done right that we want to continue, and what holds us down that we need to let go of? It is what we do with today that counts: a thousand small thoughts and big ideas, little gestures, grand plans, solid actions, inspiring words, and good intentions that form the context of our lives and showcase our integrity... or lack thereof.

Last year, the Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program (LJAP) partnered with Brighton Hospital to form a treatment fund that memorialized the imperfect yet indelible life of attorney Richard Steinberg, who died a tragic death by suicide last December. Steinberg was a Lawyers and Judges Assistance Committee (LJAC) member who was passionate about the need for LJAP to find a source of money for lawyers and judges who suffer with mental health or substance-use disorders and lack funds to be able to get the treatment they need to be restored to full function. It was this desire to develop and implement a mechanism to help his peers in need that drew him to the committee.

In hindsight, I understand that it was empathy that fueled him. It is both sad and ironic that one so vociferous about meeting the needs of others was effectively mute with regard to the depths of his own desperation. Even more ironically, he literally

sat across the table from the LJAP team and numerous concerned peers, each of whom felt a great sense of loss at his passing and, yes, even responsibility for having missed *it*—that sense of hopelessness and futility that resided in the shadows of the self of our fiery friend. Although the hole that his death created in his family, the committee, and the community cannot be filled, his family and LJAC decided that his death should not be in vain. When Brighton Hospital and LJAC had a meeting of minds about establishing a treatment fund, it seemed obviously appropriate that it should be named in Richard’s honor.

The first annual Richard Steinberg Memorial fundraising dinner, held last year at Meadowbrook Country Club in Northville, netted \$16,120. Over the past year, this money has been spent on psychiatric evaluations, substance-use treatment, and living expenses at a halfway house on Brighton’s campus for several Michigan attorneys. We were pleased and encouraged about the amount of money that was donated by law firms who underwrote the event, table sponsors, individuals who purchased tickets for the event, and concerned treatment provid-

ers and lawyers who made donations in absentia in varying amounts. By October the money was gone, and since then, there have been at least three attorneys involved with LJAP who needed financial assistance for treatment.

It is a terrible predicament as clinicians and health care providers to have before us an individual who is suffering and needs and deserves a level of care that is simply not obtainable because of a lack of funds. Under these circumstances, the LJAP team does its best to cobble together a system of treatment and support that approximates that which is optimal, yet out of reach. On a wing and a prayer, we do our best to support each of our program participants. Some fare better than others.

Within the ranks of the legal culture is an enormous sense of collegiality and loyalty that is, in my experience, unparalleled in other professions. This desire to support one’s colleagues is evidenced by the existence of LJAP, LJAC, and the LJAP volunteer network. It was also evidenced by outstanding support in the form of financial contributions for last year’s Richard Steinberg Memorial fundraising dinner. The work that

“As for my status now, I remain sober, happy, and have been more productive in my profession than I can ever remember. I maintain a positive outlook on life and have a better grasp of living life on life’s terms.”

“I cannot say ‘thank you’ enough to the colleagues who helped me with their kind donations to get my life back on track. I could not have gotten the psychiatric care and medication that I really needed without their help.”

—2009 treatment fund recipients

we do at LJAP is tri-fold: we work to facilitate healing for individual attorneys, support the integrity of the profession, and protect the public. For us, the new year does not bring a “new” resolution—just new resolve to work harder and more effectively and to reach more people in support of personal, professional, and community wellness.

What have we done right that we want to continue, and what holds us down that we need to let go of?

The second annual Richard Steinberg Memorial fundraising dinner will be held on April 15 at the Meadowbrook Country Club in Northville. Look for our save-the-date ad in this issue of the *Bar Journal*. If you can attend this event, wonderful! But even if you can't, we know that you care deeply about the health of your professional family. Please consider joining us in our resolve to support the strengths and professional integrity of your noble profession by making a donation in any amount to the Richard Steinberg Memorial Fund. ■



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