

A Beacon of Hope

The Third Annual Evening of Enlightenment Richard Steinberg Memorial Treatment Fund Dinner

By Martha D. Burkett

“Every year since it started, I look forward to attending the Evening of Enlightenment fundraising dinner. This event is a beacon of hope to me and my son, Harrison Steinberg. It saddens us to think of the tragic loss of our husband and father, but it gives us hope knowing that if even one attorney is helped by this fund, Richard did not die in vain. My son, who attends school out of state, looks forward to receiving the Evening of Enlightenment brochure. He realizes how much his father was admired and even loved by his fellow attorneys.”

It is truly enlightening to hear from the speakers, judges, and lawyers who have the courage to admit they have also been in the throes of addiction and know what it means to have a lifeline thrown to them before it is too late. There is so much time and energy spent by the LJAP staff and committee members as well as the Brighton Hospital staff and volunteers that no amount of gratitude could suffice to compensate their actions in initiating this most worthwhile event.”

The above quote is from attorney Paula Cole, who was married to Richard Steinberg. Richard, an attorney who was a Lawyers and Judges Assistance Committee member and for whom the treatment fund is named, struggled silently with a substance-use disorder and depression and ended his life in January 2008. His primary reason for joining the committee was to find a way to raise funds for lawyers who could not afford to pay for treatment.

By now, the month of April seems like a specter to me, but one event that shines like a beacon through my foggy memory is the third annual Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program (LJAP) Evening of Enlightenment



Lawyers and Judges Assistance Committee Chair Renee McDuffee and Dan McCormick, president and CEO of Brighton Hospital



Keynote speaker Timothy Batdorf, JD

Richard Steinberg Memorial Treatment Fund Dinner. Attorney Timothy Batdorf and I presented “Lawyers and Leadership: The Cutting Edge” during this year’s event, which

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was well attended and received positive audience reviews. At the evening’s conclusion, Paula shared with me her appreciation of the acknowledgement during the presentation that it is not just the afflicted individual who suffers as a result of his or her condition, but the entire family.

The Richard Steinberg Memorial Treatment Fund Dinner, held in conjunction with

the Brighton Hospital Treatment Foundation, is designed to provide information and education about attorney wellness and raises funds for attorneys who need mental health or substance-use treatment but can’t afford it. In three years, more than \$30,000 has been raised—enough to provide inpatient, outpatient, or extended care at one of Brighton’s halfway houses for nearly 20 lawyers. LJAP has yet to use funds from the \$8,500 that was netted from this year’s event, but once we do, it will go very quickly.

We are so appreciative of the generosity of our many supporters, especially Michigan State University and the Samuel L. Westerman Foundation. The amount we have raised, however, is not enough to address the growing need for treatment funds for attorneys in this uncertain economic climate.

The need for funds is perpetual; I cannot express how discouraging it is when an attorney on the phone or in front of me is ready for treatment but, because of circumstances, has depleted his or her funds and

Photo by John Fury, Brighton Hospital

Photo by Kelly Murphy, Brighton Hospital

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Left to right: Ben Hare, SBM Executive Director Janet Welch, Lori Buiteweg, and SBM President-Elect Julie Fershtman

lacks the necessary insurance coverage to pay for treatment. Sometimes we get creative and devise an ad hoc plan. In some situations these piecemeal plans are effective; in others, they are not. These individuals always have access to the support of peers and LJAP staff, but these resources alone are seldom enough. Sometimes with the help of Brighton Hospital or another treatment facility, we are able to access reduced-fee or scholarship treatment, but these opportunities are finite.

Consider this a plea on behalf of all attorneys affected by or afflicted with substance-use or other mental health disorders to donate generously to the Richard Steinberg Memorial Treatment Fund and to urge your firms, bar associations, and other legal groups to do the same. This invaluable fund may be the last hope for your brothers and sisters in the legal community who are in distress but lack necessary resources to pay for the treatment they so desperately need. Consider this a plea, as well, to remind your colleagues that assisting these attorneys is a powerful way to demonstrate loyalty to peers and commitment to professionalism in the law as well as dedication to the protection of the public.

Gifts of any amount are welcome and can bridge the gap between despair and the restoration of hope and integrity that proper treatment and ongoing support can provide. If you wish to donate, please contact Richard Kramer, president of the Brighton National Addiction Foundation, at (810) 225-2531. ■

Special Thanks to Our Donors

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Martha D. Burkett is the program administrator for the State Bar of Michigan Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program. Ms. Burkett has completed her master's degrees in public administration and

counseling education and is both a licensed professional counselor and a nationally certified counselor. She has completed graduate certification in holistic health and has achieved level II certification in addictions counseling. She is certified as an advanced-level board-certified interventionist and as an approved clinical supervisor.