

# Two Heroes of Selfless Giving



Donald G. Rockwell

**A**t the risk of incurring the disappointment, if not potential wrath, of two particular colleagues of mine, I am persuaded, nevertheless, to mention them in this President's Page for the excellent reasons you will read about. Simply put, I value both of them as friends and continuing examples of the very best we can be—not only as lawyers and judges, but also as members of our community. They are heroes in so many ways to me and to those who know and appreciate them for who they are. It's impossible for me to do justice to either of these men with this short column, but I need to give you *just a hint* of their character and generous nature.

For many years, the Genesee County Bar Association has been noted as being an active and close-knit bar association, with a wonderful history of giving back to the Flint community. There is no better example of this than our holiday dinner, held annually in December for the benefit of those with limited resources. Among the many events sponsored by the GCBA, none gathers more volunteers and financial support or has a greater impact on our local community.

From its humble beginnings in 1992, the dinner has grown to the point where it has served holiday meals and given toys, bicycles, and books to almost 20,000 Flint residents. During this time, GCBA members have donated almost \$200,000, and more

than 2,700 members have provided countless volunteer hours.

Those of us in Genesee County know that the success and impact of the dinner is due primarily to the efforts of one person who has guided the event since its inception: Brian Barkey, a long-practicing and outstanding attorney who is loved by many.<sup>1</sup> I don't know of a more humble and unassuming individual than Brian, and he is the last person to accept credit for anything he does while giving to our bar and the community.<sup>2</sup> Brian, in his self-deprecating manner, has said this about his role in the holiday dinner: "Lots of lawyers in Genesee County do way more than I do. The idea for the holiday dinner was not mine. It was Duncan Beagle's idea."<sup>3</sup>

Brian's quote leads me to the second individual I wish to mention in this column—Genesee County Circuit Court Judge Duncan Beagle. I was a year behind Duncan in high school and, as is typical for underclassmen, I looked up to and admired him not only for his leadership in high school but also for his remarkable athletic abilities. Duncan was a member of the football, basketball, and baseball teams. He didn't know me then, but I knew of him—as did everyone else in school. Duncan's education and athletic career continued at Albion College, where he was a star pitcher for the baseball team.<sup>4</sup>

As luck would have it, Duncan and I roomed together in law school, and we certainly got to know each other. I quickly recognized that Duncan was going to be outstanding at whatever he chose to do in the legal profession—and that was the case when he began practicing law.<sup>5</sup>

What truly sets Duncan apart began in 1991, a most tumultuous year when he was hospitalized for months for sudden transverse myelitis, which paralyzed him from the waist down. All of us knew Duncan as among the most energetic and giving of our colleagues; we couldn't help but wonder how this tragic event would affect him. Suffice it to say that, in total Duncan Beagle fashion, he reacted to this unfortunate in-

cident in most notable and positive ways: that same year, he was appointed to the circuit court bench and married his lovely wife, Dana.

To me, Duncan is the same person he was when I knew him before his illness. Among his numerous positive traits, that sameness remains to me his most impressive characteristic. Duncan continues to be among the most active, giving individuals in our community, and one who always has a smile on his face and a good word for all. His wheelchair has not slowed or changed him.

I've asked for forgiveness previously for occasionally dwelling on my hometown and local colleagues, but for me the opportunity to recognize two outstanding individuals in this fashion comes seldom in a lifetime. That's why I'm compelled to write about Brian Barkey and Duncan Beagle, and why I—like so many others—love these men for who they are and everything they do.<sup>6</sup> ■

## ENDNOTES

1. This column does not have room to list the numerous other behind-the-scenes services Brian has performed and continues to do for so many of us. Brian's sister, Genesee County Probate Judge Jennie Barkey, and his other family members refer to Brian lovingly as "Saint Brian."
2. Fortunately, Brian set aside his humility just long enough to accept the 2009 Unsung Hero Award from the State Bar Representative Assembly.
3. Wray, *Salute to the Unsung Hero: State Bar of Michigan Recognizes Brian Barkey*, *Genesee County Bar Association Bar Beat*, July/August 2009, p 5 <[http://www.gcbalaw.org/file/barbeat/July\\_Aug\\_09\\_BB.pdf](http://www.gcbalaw.org/file/barbeat/July_Aug_09_BB.pdf)>. All websites cited in this article were accessed April 16, 2018.
4. One of Duncan's proudest moments is when he pitched Albion College to a victory over Michigan State in 1970.
5. Again, like Brian, there simply is not enough space in this column to do Duncan even the slightest justice in attempting to describe his years of volunteerism to many community organizations while working his day job as an outstanding lawyer and judge.
6. See also Cullari, *Hon. Duncan M. Beagle*, 84 Mich B J 52 (January 2005) <<https://www.michbar.org/file/barjournal/article/documents/pdf4article825.pdf>> and Cullari, *Brian Barkey*, 84 Mich B J 38 (December 2005) <<https://www.michbar.org/file/barjournal/article/documents/pdf4article949.pdf>>.

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