

A Time to Celebrate Our Best

By Mike Eidelbes, Lynn Ingram, and Samantha Meinke

The State Bar of Michigan will honor exemplary representatives of the legal profession during the 2014 Awards Banquet, held from 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. on Wednesday, September 17 at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel in Grand Rapids. The banquet will take place in conjunction with the SBM Annual Meeting. Outgoing SBM President Brian D. Einhorn and incoming SBM President Thomas C. Rombach will present the following awards to recipients during the banquet.

Roberts P. Hudson Award

Francine Cullari has tirelessly served the legal profession by chairing the SBM Publications and Website Advisory Committee, the group that oversees the SBM website and the *Michigan Bar Journal*, and serving on the SBM Representative Assembly and Board of Commissioners as well as on the Awards Committee and Public Outreach Committee. She has also been very active with the Genesee County Bar Association, directs the Michigan Family Business Center, teaches as an adjunct professor at the University of Michigan, and is an incredibly active volunteer with many Genesee County charitable organizations.

Carl E. Ver Beek has worked for decades as one of the nation's preeminent labor lawyers and has served on American Bar Association councils, committees, and task forces devoted to labor and employment law and alternative dispute resolution. He has chaired the SBM Committee on Character and Fitness for 10 years and currently sits on the Attorney Discipline Board. He also served on the Attorney Grievance Commission from 1999 to 2005, including three years as its chair. So selfless has he been that his colleagues find themselves asking, "What would Carl do?" in their own professional lives.

Frank J. Kelley Distinguished Public Service Award

For more than 30 years, **Corbin R. Davis** has served as clerk of the Michigan Supreme Court. The rest of his career was also spent in public service with nearly 10 years as deputy clerk of the Supreme Court and another five years at various positions within Ingham County government. He is recognized not only for the length of his career but also the excellent quality of his work. At the Supreme Court he is known as "The Good Steward," the peacemaker, and the omniscient guide to the arcane matters of Supreme Court review.

Champion of Justice Award

Bridgette A. Carr found her calling when she took on her first human trafficking case, a study-abroad scheme that took female college students from Eastern Europe, brought them to Detroit, and forced them into the sex industry for no pay. Carr helped bring the leaders of that trafficking ring to justice and she's been fighting for other victims ever since 2009, when she founded and began directing the University of Michigan Human Trafficking Law Clinic, the first of its kind. She also serves on the Michigan Human Trafficking Task Force and the Michigan Human Trafficking Commission, two groups that have successfully passed 19 new laws in the state to help victims.

Over the course of two years, eight days of testimony during trial, and an ongoing appeals process, a team of four Michigan attorneys—**Kenneth M. Mogill**, **Dana M. Nessel**, **Robert A. Sedler**, and **Carole M. Stanyar**—served as a model of superior lawyering. In *DeBoer v Snyder*, the four attorneys represented the plaintiffs, April DeBoer and Jayne Rowse, a lesbian couple who sought to jointly adopt their three children born with special needs. In a case that unfolded in a media firestorm, the four attorneys worked tirelessly, largely on a pro bono basis, and meticulously laid out the facts and the law and maintained professionalism at all times.

Brian L. Morrow just might have done more than anyone else in Michigan over the last decade to help teens avoid lives of crime. Deputy chief of the juvenile division of the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office since 2004, Morrow was instrumental in launching and expanding the county's teen court program, which empowers teens to serve as a jury for their peers in simple misdemeanor cases like shoplifting and minor in possession of alcohol. The program gives juvenile offenders the opportunity to clear their records, and the recidivism rate for teens who go through the program is lower than those adjudicated in formal juvenile court. It also exposes teens to the legal system in a positive, proactive way.

Champion of Justice Award *(continued)*

Michael L. Pitt, managing partner at Pitt McGehee Palmer & Rivers, has devoted thousands of hours to volunteer work on American Civil Liberties Union cases. His most significant case to date involved a class-action lawsuit against the Michigan Department of Corrections charging that male prison guards raped and abused more than 500 female inmates housed in the state's prisons. Litigation unfolded for more than a dozen years until the case was finally settled for \$100 million and the state government undertook significant reforms to prisons, including instituting a new regulation that male prison guards no longer staff female residential units in the state's prisons and jails.

Dawn A. Van Hoek, executive director of the State Appellate Defender Office, rallied a team for 10 years to fight for creating a working constitutionally compliant trial-level public defense system in Michigan. The team's work led to the passage of groundbreaking legislation in July 2013 creating the Michigan Indigent Defense Commission. Also among Van Hoek's accomplishments is the creation of the SADO Resource Center, which provides criminal defense attorneys statewide with access to pleadings, practice manuals, summaries of appellate decisions, newsletters, and training events. The resource center has created a sense of community and support among criminal defense attorneys across the state and empowered them to do their best possible work.

Kimberly M. Cahill Bar Leadership Award

The Eastern District of Michigan chapter of the Federal Bar Association came to **Thomas G. McNeill** and asked him to help meet the court's growing need for pro bono volunteers to assist pro se litigants in civil cases. McNeill dove into the challenge. He created a system called the Eastern District of Michigan Pro Bono Council comprised of eight bar associations, 32 law firms, an alternative dispute resolution organization, a litigation services firm, and dozens of individual southeast Michigan attorneys. Immediately, the group pledged to handle 115 pro bono cases and assignments for the court. McNeill also secured funding for the project and had experts draft materials to serve as guides to pro bono attorneys.

John W. Cummiskey Pro Bono Award

Susan M. Kornfield, chair of the intellectual property practice group at Bodman's Ann Arbor office, estimates she has provided 10,000 hours of free legal services to low-income people since she began practicing law in 1982. She's handled cases for prisoners involving discrimination against a deaf inmate, inadequate medical care, prison brutality, and retaliation for filing grievances. She established a walk-in clinic at Detroit's Capuchin Soup Kitchen and Saints Peter and Paul Warming Center and assisted with Street Outreach Court Detroit, a 36th Judicial District Court program to assist homeless people. She is also largely responsible for establishing Bodman's pro bono program, regarded as one of the best in the nation.

Liberty Bell Award

Gary B. Lasceski worked tirelessly to educate students in Michigan's thumb for 40 years. After his retirement from teaching at Vassar High School, he still continues to run the school's Youth in Government Program and works as an advisor to its Youth in Government Model Judiciary Program team, ensuring students have the opportunity to participate in the Youth in Government Model Judiciary Program mock trial competition in Lansing. He tirelessly goes over mock trial materials with students; explains court functions; and teaches students the basics of the criminal justice system, the rules of evidence, how to advocate for a client or a position, and the importance of the functions of the court system. He taps the local prosecutor's office for assistance in a dress rehearsal with his students at their local courthouse.

High school student **Matilyn Sarosi** agreed with the United States Supreme Court ruling in *Miller v Alabama*, which held that sentencing juveniles to life in prison without the possibility of parole violated the Eighth Amendment's ban on cruel and unusual punishment. But she didn't agree with the idea that the ruling would not apply retroactively to 363 prisoners sentenced as juveniles. So she sought advice from her attorney aunt and other attorneys across the state, read all the *Miller* briefs, researched juvenile justice cases, wrote and rewrote an amicus brief to the Michigan Supreme Court, and convinced 452 students in her school to sign on to it.

Awards from Other Organizations

Five individuals will also be honored by other organizations during the Awards Banquet. The Michigan State Bar Foundation will honor three individuals posthumously: **Hon. Hilda R. Gage** will receive the Founders Award and **Michael C. Chielens** and **Holli J. Wallace** will receive Access to Justice Awards.

The Michigan Defense Trial Counsel and the Michigan Association for Justice will present Respected Advocate Awards to **Thomas R. Behm** and **John E. McSorley**.

Representative Assembly Awards

The State Bar of Michigan Representative Assembly will present awards to two individuals during its business meeting on Thursday, September 18.

Michael Franck Award

Julie I. Fershtman is a brave and bold leader. She paves the way in her field of equine law, traveling the country trying cases, writing books and a blog, and speaking to attorneys and equine experts. She has long been a leader at the State Bar, heading up the Young Lawyers Section and Representative Assembly, and serving as president of the Board of Commissioners in 2011. During her SBM presidency, she spearheaded the creation of the Bar's mentoring center. She takes her role as a mentor seriously, encouraging young female attorneys to follow in her footsteps. She wrote a section for an American Bar Association book on women lawyers who took risks to form their own practices and was chosen out of 100 authors to share her experiences at the ABA Annual Meeting.

Unsung Hero Award

Susan F. Reed believes everyone deserves quality legal defense regardless of the horrific crimes they are accused of committing. She has represented drug dealers, serial rapists, and murderers. She is currently representing a notorious handyman-turned-alleged-hitman in a very tough case, as the defendant gave multiple stories to police and details of the murder have been leaked to local media. The judge said he assigned the case to Reed because he believes she does an exceptional job with clients in difficult situations. Beyond representing challenging clients, Reed works to improve the work of all defense attorneys. A longtime active leader in the Wayne County Criminal Defense Bar, she currently serves as the organization's president.

To read complete coverage of all SBM award winners, visit <http://bit.ly/sbmawards>



Randall Velzen
Current President

Lori Becker
Past President 2013

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2012

Monika Sacks
2011

Peter Everts
2010

Deborah Berez
2009

Danielle Smith
2008

Siri Gottlieb
2007

Cheryl Fletcher
2006

Jane Fahey
2005

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