

UpFront

By Naseem Stecker and Mike Eidelbes

Hon. Phillip E. Harter Receives 2006 Michael Irish Award

The council of the Probate and Estate Planning Section has honored Judge Phillip E. Harter of the Calhoun County Probate Court with its 2006 Michael Irish Award. The award is given in honor of the late Michael Irish to the member of the section who best epitomizes service to the section, to the trusts and estates practice generally, and to the community.

Judge Harter's accomplishments are many. He served as chairperson of the Michigan Supreme Court Task Force on Guardianships and Conservatorships and as a member of the Michigan Supreme Court bar examination staff (1976-1991). He is a member of the Calhoun County Bar Association, a Fellow of the Michigan Bar Foundation, and a member of the Bar of the U.S.



Court of Appeals and the U.S. Supreme Court. Judge Harter is immediate past chairperson of the State Bar of Michigan Pro-

bate and Estate Planning Section Council, former chairperson of the Probate Law Committee, and former chairperson of the Probate Rules Committee of the Michigan Probate Judges Association. He reviews cases for the *Michigan Probate and Estate Planning Journal* and has lectured at ICLE's Annual Probate and Estate Planning Conferences.

Judge Harter is credited with creating and maintaining the online "EPIC Questions and Answers" (<http://courts.co.calhoun.mi.us/epic0000.htm>) as well as "Probate Notes" (<http://courts.co.calhoun.mi.us/notes000.htm>) and "Probate Review" (<http://courts.co.calhoun.mi.us/review00.htm>). The sites have been a valuable resource to trusts and estates practitioners. ■

Sommers Schwartz Attorneys Featured on "Ask the Lawyer"

Attorneys from Sommers Schwartz, P.C, a Southfield firm, will be on the air answering questions from the public in February and March on "Ask the Lawyer." Daniel D. Swanson and Donald J. Gasiorek, senior shareholders in the firm, were featured in February. The radio program, initiated by the State Bar, recently debuted on Michigan Talk Network's The Big Show. "Ask the Lawyer," produced at WJIM-AM in Lansing, will be simulcast on 10 stations throughout the state. The call-in show will feature a different law firm on the fourth Thursday of each month from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. Law firms and practitioners interested in being featured on "Ask the Lawyer" should contact Tim Hygh at (517) 394-7272 ext. 277 or tim.hygh@citcomm.com. ■

A Proposed Tax on Legal Services

Lawyers around the state have been speaking out on the impact of a proposed two percent tax on services, including legal services, that the governor has introduced to address a sizable budget deficit for both the current and coming fiscal year. Governor Granholm has requested a June 1, 2007, date to start collecting on the new tax. The State Bar's message in opposition to the tax on legal services is simple: most legal services are not discretionary. The tax would fall most heavily on those who are already facing significant stress and misfortune, such as family troubles, bankruptcy, debt collection, or threat of prosecution. A tax on legal services for citizens is essentially a misery tax, increasing the burden

on those individuals who Michigan attorneys already work at helping through pro bono service, donations to legal aid, and reduced hourly rates. The tax would also punish those who seek legal counsel to make responsible personal and business management actions. It also has the added disadvantage of encouraging clients to seek legal advice outside the state. For more on the State Bar's position, current developments, and information on how to become involved, visit <http://www.michbar.org/publicpolicy/>; to stay current, subscribe to the weekly Public Policy Update. Questions can be directed to the Bar's Public Policy Program Analyst, Elizabeth Lyon, at elyon@mail.michbar.org. ■