

State Bar of Michigan 2008 Award Winners

Compiled by Mike Eidelbes

This year's most outstanding attorneys and winners of major State Bar awards will be honored Wednesday, September 17, at a banquet in Dearborn during the Annual Meeting. Representative Assembly award winners will be recognized at the RA business meeting on Thursday, September 18. The following are the 2008 winners:

Roberts P. Hudson Award

Kimberly M. Cahill
(Posthumously)
State Bar of Michigan President,
2007–2008



Kimberly M. Cahill, who passed away in January 2008 following a brief battle with cancer, is best known for her numerous leadership roles and for the unusual and extraordinary depth of her commitment. The immediate past president of the State Bar of Michigan, Cahill spent a decade on the SBM Board of Commissioners, chaired the SBM Representative Assembly in 1999–2000, served as president of the Women's Lawyers Association of Michigan in 1996, and was president of the Macomb County Bar Association in 2001–2002.

Cahill also chaired the SBM Access to Justice Campaign and sat on the board of the Michigan State Bar Foundation, which helps administer and coordinate grants to legal service providers. She was a founding member and recent past president of the Macomb County Bar Foundation and treasurer of the WLAM Foundation, which promotes educational opportunities for women lawyers and law students.

"No one outworked Kim Cahill or devoted more time and effort to advancing the interests of justice and the legal profession," State Bar of Michigan Commissioner Bruce A. Courtaide said.

She never strayed from her Macomb County roots. A lifelong resident of Warren, Cahill practiced law in Center Line for more than 20 years with her mother, Florence Schoenherr-Warne, and sister, Dana M. Warne—focusing on real estate, probate, estate planning, and family law matters.

Roberts P. Hudson Award

Kathleen McCree Lewis (Posthumously)
Attorney, Dykema Gossett, PLLC



Kathleen McCree Lewis's list of accomplishments is lengthy and impressive. A colleague summed up her legal career—one that spanned more than three decades—in just five words. "She was," said Gov. Jennifer Granholm, "a perfect lawyer."

Lewis, who passed away in October after a lengthy battle with cancer, would have demurred at such lofty praise, but a cursory glance at her achievements bears witness to her contributions to the legal community and her role as an appellate advocate. One of the country's pre-eminent appellate practitioners, Lewis was a member of the American Academy of Appellate Lawyers, an elite, invitation-only national organization, serving as the group's president in 2005–2006, and she was instrumental in the creation of the State Bar of Michigan Appellate Practice Section.

Lewis chaired the 6th U.S. Court of Appeals Rules Advisory Committee for three years, with the goal of updating the court's antiquated local rules. President Bill Clinton twice nominated her for a Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals judgeship; in both cases, her nominations stalled because of partisan infighting. Lewis also donated her time, talents, and resources to a number of community organizations, including the Children's Hospital of Michigan, the City of Detroit Civic Center, and the Detroit Children's Museum.

Frank J. Kelley Distinguished Public Service Award

Thomas L. Casey
Solicitor General, State of Michigan



In her statement nominating Thomas L. Casey for the Frank J. Kelley Distinguished Public Service Award, Assistant Attorney General Julie McMurtry wrote, "He is always conscious of the big picture, while not losing sight of the details [and] has always been flexible in the process, while never sacrificing the integrity of the office."

Casey retired from his post as Michigan's solicitor general this past July, almost 16 years to the day when he took the job. His

longevity in such a demanding position is truly remarkable. Responsible for all civil and criminal appellate litigation involving the state of Michigan in both state and federal courts, Casey was in charge of a staff of 280 attorneys that filed more than a thousand appellate briefs annually and he edited each one of them. Yet in the nearly 70-year history of the solicitor general's office, Casey held the job longer than all but two other men.

His career in the Michigan Attorney General's office began in 1975, when he joined Frank J. Kelley's staff as an assistant attorney general. Nearly a decade later, he ascended to assistant solicitor general, and became Michigan's eighth solicitor general in 1992.

During his tenure, Casey argued nine cases on behalf of the state in front of the U.S. Supreme Court, taking up matters ranging from sobriety checkpoints and Fourth Amendment guarantees to whether prisoners have a constitutional right to visitation. He also argued 23 cases before the Michigan Supreme Court regarding issues of governmental immunity, jurisdictional limits of courts, and the constitutionality of statutory proposals.

Frank J. Kelley Distinguished Public Service Award

Bruce A. Timmons
Legal Counsel, Michigan House
of Representatives



You know you've made an impact on your colleagues when they turn your last name into an adjective. Around the state capital, legislators often ask if a bill has been "Timmonized"—referring to whether the measure passed muster with Bruce A. Timmons, legal counsel to the minority party members of the Michigan House of Representatives Judiciary Committee.

Though advising the Judiciary Committee's minority is his primary task, Timmons' behind-the-scenes efforts on behalf of the political process extend to other areas. In addition to scrutinizing every piece of legislation assigned to the Judiciary Committee, he routinely gives similar treatment to measures that reach the House floor through other committees.

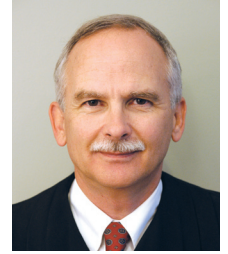
As the clearinghouse for legislation for more than 40 years, Timmons is not only the foremost expert on Michigan law, he's also its historian. Ask him about a law or a proposed law from the past, and he'll likely tell you the reasons the measure passed, failed, or was amended.

The group of Legislative Service Bureau attorneys that nominated Timmons for the Kelley Award identified a key reason he has been able to thrive—some might say survive—in his post for four decades.

"Regardless of the policies or politics of the party employing him at the time," wrote the lawyers, "Bruce was able to give straightforward legal advice—to call 'em like he sees 'em."

Champion of Justice Award

David A. Hoort
Judge, 8th Circuit Court



During his tenure with the 8th Circuit Court serving Ionia and Montcalm counties, Judge David A. Hoort has forged a well-deserved reputation as an innovator. The many programs he has implemented have a common goal: improving the way the court serves the public.

Among Hoort's creations were monthly court sessions on Saturday mornings, regularly scheduled night sessions for the circuit's small claims court, and trials in high schools with students serving as jurors in real criminal cases. He worked with the Friend of the Court and the court's probation officers to set up a program in which representatives of both agencies made regular home visits to monitor defendants on probation and track down parents failing to pay child support, and he established sentencing guidelines for misdemeanor offenses.

A Michigan Supreme Court appointee to the Judicial Institute Family Division Academic Advisory Committee, Hoort helped write a resource handbook for the state's Friend of the Court offices, set up a coordinated response to domestic violence in Ionia County, and authored guidelines for determining spousal support in domestic relations cases.

No summary of Judge Hoort's achievements is complete without mentioning the 8th Circuit's Mental Health Court, the first of its kind in the state. Similar to drug and alcohol courts, the goal of the program is to assess the mental health status of felony offenders and get them the help they need to overcome those issues.

Champion of Justice Award

Michael Lavoie
Senior Partner, Butzel Long



About four years ago, Michael Lavoie arrived at Lincoln Middle School in Pontiac, where he had agreed to serve as volunteer mentor to at-risk students. The other mentor assigned to the school by the Pontiac Alumni Foundation—a group of professionals committed to addressing the city's problems and providing opportunities for its youths—didn't show. A Foundation charter member, Lavoie knew the group needed a hands-on approach to affect children's lives, and that the Foundation's future likely hinged on success or failure of the mentoring effort.

Lavoie improvised. He called Lincoln's principal and asked to meet with the school's 26 most at-risk students, none of whom were expected to advance beyond the eighth grade. The group, which met every Wednesday morning during the school year, became known as the Gettysburg Group in reference to the school name.

What started as a mentoring effort quickly branched out into other areas. Lavoie, who spent time in Burkina Faso during a stint in the Peace Corps, led the Gettysburg Group in a study of

African countries, took them to museums, and got them involved in community service. Lavoie, in turn, encouraged and engaged the kids at every turn, spoke frequently with their parents, and attended school functions.

Lavoie, who remains in contact with the original Gettysburg Group members, now conducts mentor training for the Pontiac Alumni Foundation. The Foundation adopted the Gettysburg Group blueprint for the entire Pontiac School District, and now serves more than 400 kids with 85 volunteer mentors.

Champion of Justice Award

Mary DuFour Morrow
Lead Attorney, Childhood Lead
Prevention Unit, Wayne County
Prosecutor's Office



Lead poisoning of children is a distressing problem, especially in cities with older housing stock. Hazards of exposure to lead—which include brain damage, learning disabilities, behavior problems, anemia, seizures, and, in extreme cases, death—are particularly troubling because they are typically asymptomatic and irreversible.

Armed with a relatively new state law, Mary DuFour Morrow has pioneered the prosecution of landlords who knowingly rent lead-laden properties where a child is later poisoned. The only prosecutor in the state attacking lead poisoning cases in this manner, her efforts have led to the remediation of 125 contaminated properties across Wayne County.

Because of her groundbreaking work in this area, Morrow has become the state's pre-eminent authority on legal issues surrounding lead abatement, and she is regularly invited to speak on the matter to state agencies and civic leaders. She is involved in childhood lead poisoning programs funded by federal Environmental Protection Agency grants in Detroit, Lansing, Berrien County, and Wayne County.

Morrow's work was highlighted earlier this year by a pair of achievements. In March, Gov. Jennifer Granholm appointed Morrow to the Michigan Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention and Control Commission, a panel charged with eliminating lead poisoning in children statewide by 2010. Two months later, Michigan's Council for Maternal and Child Health presented her with its Advocate of the Year award.

Champion of Justice Award

Joan Vestrand
Assistant Dean and Professor,
Thomas M. Cooley Law School



Ask a colleague of Joan Vestrand to summarize her career and it's almost certain that the words "professional responsibility" will be mentioned. Vestrand, an assistant dean at Thomas M. Cooley Law School's Auburn Hills campus, has been associated with the institution's Professional Responsibility Department since its inception in 2002.

To her, professional responsibility also includes a duty to give back to the community. Vestrand's opportunity to do just that arose after accepting an invitation to speak at a function at Northern High School in Pontiac. She was dismayed by what she found—filthy classrooms, outdated equipment, and students who couldn't afford to comply with the district's dress code.

Vestrand enlisted the help of some of her Cooley students and took action, cleaning classrooms, collecting clothing for those lacking proper attire, taking kids on field trips, providing mentoring and tutoring, and even resolving a dispute between rival groups suspended from school for fighting. A program on character, conduct, and personal success that she presented to incoming ninth grade students in conjunction with the district's new ninth-grade academy evolved into "Success on Saturdays," a program open to Northern students and their parents that takes place two Saturdays each month.

The effort has grown exponentially. Collaborators include General Motors; Northern High School alumni; Oakland County Judge Fred Mester; the Oakland, Wolverine, and Straker Bar associations; and a number of area law firms and businesses.

Champion of Justice Award

Lorraine H. Weber
Executive Director,
Detroit Metropolitan Bar Association



Since becoming an attorney more than 30 years ago, Lorraine H. Weber has devoted much of her career to women and minorities who have sought racial, ethnic, and gender fairness in the courts and the legal profession. Her mission started in Wayne County's probate and juvenile court where, in a variety of roles, she championed the rights of children and families.

In 1988, Weber became executive director of two Michigan Supreme Court task forces—one on gender issues and the other on issues of race and ethnicity. During a two-year period, she oversaw two separate investigations into bias in the courts; the task forces submitted to the state Supreme Court 167 recommendations on ways to improve fairness for women and minorities in the legal profession.

As chair of the SBM Representative Assembly from 1990 to 1992, Weber used her position to bring more women and minorities into bar leadership and focused on improving programs for underrepresented groups in the law. In 1997, she was tapped by the State Bar to serve as special advisor to its Open Justice Commission and consultant on open justice issues. During her six years in that post, the commission implemented more than 35 programs, including one to increase pro bono representation of domestic violence victims statewide, a sentencing guidelines disparity study, and treatment of girls in the juvenile justice system.

Since 2004, Weber has served as executive director of the Detroit Metropolitan Bar Association. Among her achievements at the DMBA are balancing the organization's budget and increasing membership by 25 percent.

John W. Cummiskey Pro Bono Award

Richard H. Bernstein
Attorney, Law Offices
of Samuel Bernstein



“My goal,” attorney Richard Bernstein said in an interview with the *Detroit Legal News* last year, “is to use the resources that I’ve been blessed with to try to enhance and allow for other people who are faced with challenges to try to live as easy a life as they can.”

That goal has been reached, but Bernstein strives for more, particularly when the issues relate to people with disabilities. Blind since birth, Bernstein has taken on pro bono work in cases ranging from wheelchair access to Detroit buses, disabled access at Michigan Stadium, and the safety of disabled pedestrians at Oakland County roundabout traffic intersections.

An attorney in his father’s law office since graduating from Northwestern University Law School, Bernstein was selected as winner of the 2003–2004 Regeana Myrick Award by the State Bar of Michigan Young Lawyers Section for his commitment to public service. In 2002, the Macomb Intermediate School District presented him with a special recognition award for his work on behalf of disabled students and their families. Last year, he was the Detroit Jewish Community Relations Council’s choice for its Activist of the Year honor.

In his role as vice chairman of the Wayne State University Board of Governors, Bernstein has focused on making attending college more affordable and addressing disability concerns. In that vein, he recently authored the SBM Equal Access Initiative’s disabilities e-newsletter. His article, titled “Determining Proper Accommodations for Deaf Law Students,” addressed the challenges that hearing-impaired law students face on a daily basis.

Liberty Bell Award

Rachel Crandall
Founder, TransGender Michigan

A little more than a decade ago, Rachel Crandall was married, a psychologist at a small-town hospital with two degrees from Michigan State University. Back then she was, in fact, a he—Richard Crandall, struggling with the feelings that so often accompany transgender people.

Crandall made the decision to “live honestly,” as a journalist chronicling Crandall’s life wrote, on November 5, 1997. Shortly thereafter, Rachel lost her marriage, job, and career. She was in the middle of a crisis with nowhere to turn. Crandall did know, however, that she didn’t want anyone facing a similar plight to make the journey alone. The seeds were planted for TransGen-

der Michigan, the agency Crandall co-founded with the mission of bringing together all transgender people in the state.

In the 10 years since TransGender Michigan was launched, the organization has grown much. Initially, Crandall put together a website and a statewide calendar of events for the organization. Shortly thereafter, the group launched a telephone help line—it currently rings directly to Crandall’s personal cell phone. Today, offerings include an online chat room for transgender people and their family and friends, a directory of businesses that have reached out to the transgender community, housing information, and an extensive section with answers to common questions.

TransGender Michigan has also worked with the state chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union to co-sponsor legal clinics providing assistance and guidance to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community, and co-sponsored Transgender Lobby Day at the state capitol.

Liberty Bell Award

Jesse Gonzalez
Saginaw Public Schools

There have been a number of memorable legal thrillers to reach the big screen over the years—Cruise and Nicholson squaring off in *A Few Good Men*, Gregory Peck’s turn as Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *Jury Duty*, the Pauly Shore masterpiece. For students in Saginaw’s public schools system, however, those titles pale in comparison to epics such as *State v Golden Locks a/k/a Goldie Locks* and *State v Jack Poorson a/k/a Jack and the Beanstock*.

Those last two features aren’t showing at the local cineplex. They’re student-led plays produced by Jesse Gonzales, media operations specialist with Saginaw Public Schools, in conjunction with its annual Law Day festivities. The son of a Texas migrant worker and a Korean immigrant, Gonzalez has worked with Saginaw’s Law Day committee for five years. In addition to assisting with the writing, rehearsing, filming, and post-production of the aforementioned plays, he also puts together “Law Day and You,” an annual program focusing on a central theme that gives students the chance to question lawmakers and other public officials about the topic.

Gonzalez’s association with legal issues doesn’t end with Law Day. He’s produced a video and shorter, public service-type announcements on behalf of Saginaw County’s school truancy initiative. He is also working on an orientation video for youths entering the county detention facility, and has on deck a video featuring family division judges for use with the county’s domestic relations and parent education program.

Representative Assembly Award Winners

Michael Franck Award

Thomas E. Brennan Sr., Attorney



Thomas Brennan's impact on Michigan's legal landscape would not have been possible without the help of the state's registered voters. Had Brennan won the election for the state House of Representatives in 1952 or the special election in 1955 to replace deceased 15th District Congressman John Dingell Sr. in Congress, it likely would have pre-empted a burgeoning legal career.

Brennan's fortunes with the electorate would change, however. The Detroit native left private practice after he was the voters' choice in 1961 for a seat on the Common Pleas Bench. Two years later, Gov. George Romney appointed him to the Wayne County Circuit Court bench; he won re-election to that post the following year. In 1966, at the urging of Gov. Romney, Brennan entered the race for Michigan Supreme Court associate justice and won. Three years later, at age 40, Brennan became the youngest chief justice in state history.

Later in his tenure on the state's highest bench, Brennan developed a vision of opening a private law school in Lansing. In 1972, he incorporated Thomas M. Cooley Law School, and left the Supreme Court in 1973 to devote his energies to the fledgling institution. He was Cooley's dean until 1978, when he became the school's first president. Today, Cooley, which boasts campuses in Lansing, Grand Rapids, and Auburn Hills, is the nation's largest law school as measured by full-time and part-time students.

Unsung Hero Award

Susan Spagnuolo-Dal, Attorney, Legal Aid of South Central Michigan



The letter nominating Legal Aid of South Central Michigan attorney Susan Spagnuolo-Dal for the Unsung Hero Award is among the more interesting statements of support you'll see. It mentions, among other things, her disarming sense of humor, unconventional footwear, and offbeat fashion sense.

Thankfully, taste in footwear is not among the award criteria. In her 30 years as an attorney in Livingston County concentrating on family law, Spagnuolo-Dal has dedicated herself to serving people who lack the means to protect their legal rights. She has earned a reputation as a straight-talking lawyer who treats her clients with dignity and respect, helping them understand the legal process and representing them with a positive attitude—traits that reflect her previous occupation as a teacher.

Her knowledge of the legal system and integrity are unparalleled, and she routinely goes beyond the role of the traditional attorney. She has accompanied opposing counsel on home visits, given up family time—Spagnuolo-Dal is the mother of 10 chil-

dren—to meet with clients, and she is an advocate of the need for lawyers to ensure representation for all.

A letter supporting Spagnuolo-Dal's nomination perhaps best sums up the characteristics that make her a natural choice for the honor. "There is a genuine concern to help a low-income person receive the same legal help obtainable by those with more economic means," wrote attorney Tony Paruk. "Often times, the young, old, and poor are those who need the most help going through the legal system. Sue is always there for them."

Founders Award Winners

The Michigan State Bar Foundation presents its Founders Award to lawyers who exemplify professional excellence and outstanding community contributions.

Patrick J. Bruetsch



Patrick J. Bruetsch's practice at Bruetsch and Associates in Birmingham includes personal injury, mass torts, and business litigation. He was named in *Michigan Super Lawyers* in 2006, a distinction achieved through ratings by peers. Bruetsch has given countless hours to professional and community volunteer efforts, including providing legal information to the public on the "Ask the Lawyer" radio show, assisting law students as a moot court judge, giving presentations to the Young Lawyers Section, and working with nonprofit groups such as the Cystic Fibrosis Coalition, Life Directions, Power Squadron, and Habitat for Humanity. He received his BA and MA, both magna cum laude, from the University of Michigan and his law degree from the University of Detroit School of Law where he served on Law Review. When Bruetsch was instrumental in directing \$1.45 million in cy pres funds from a federal class action lawsuit to three charities in 2007, he said it was particularly fulfilling as a lawyer that some of that amount helped build a permanent Access to Justice Fund endowment at the Foundation.

Kimberly M. Cahill (Posthumously)

Kimberly M. Cahill, who passed away in January 2008, was a Life Fellow of the Foundation and a member of the Foundation's Board of Trustees. She had also been president of the State Bar of Michigan, chair of the State Bar Representative Assembly, member of the State Bar Board of Commissioners, president of the Macomb County Bar Association, founding member and president of the Macomb County Bar Foundation, and president of the Women Lawyers Association of Michigan. She received both her BA and JD degrees from the University of Michigan, after which she practiced law in Center Line at Schoenherr and Cahill for more than 20 years. One of her many lasting contributions was to give leadership to the Access to Justice Campaign as its state-wide chair and to bring together the Campaign's partners (the State Bar, the Foundation, and Michigan's legal aid providers) to work together to guide fundraising for civil legal aid for the poor.