

Attorneys Take on Starring Roles to Make a Difference

By Lori A. Buiteweg

I recently attended the State Bar Annual Meeting in Dearborn and came away awed and impressed by the lawyers in our midst who are so giving and inspiring. Fittingly, these bright stars were honored for their selfless public service, tireless dedication to noble causes, and their ability to cast aside all obstacles and go beyond the call of duty to help others. It is humbling to walk among them and pay tribute to their accomplishments.

Constitution Day, which occurs yearly on September 17, fell smack dab in the middle of the Annual Meeting this year. At the very moment our State Bar officers were being sworn into office by Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Marilyn Kelly, many lesser-known heroes were working hard to ensure that school children across the state were learning about the Constitution. During the Representative Assembly meeting this year, which also took place on September 17, new Chairperson Elizabeth M. Johnson said, "Today, many attorneys and judges are working with students across the state to teach them about the Constitution and the rule of law. I wish to give special recognition and a thank you to the attorneys and judges who work so hard to educate the public and participate in civic education. It is important that we in the legal profession support these efforts."

One such project involved sixth graders in the Ann Arbor public schools. Twenty-seven Washtenaw County attorneys vacated courtrooms and entered classrooms to teach more than 1,000 students a few things about the Sixth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The impetus for the special effort is a Michigan law requiring all schools to observe Constitution Day with a "proper and appropriate commemorative exercise." In past years, some students took field trips to the courthouse, but the need to reach more students mobilized lawyers into the schools. The curriculum and photos of the



Ann Arbor attorney Bettina Schlossberg of Pear Sperling Eggen & Daniels reviews a list of potential jurors with sixth graders at Greenhills School in the fictitious case of *People of the State of Michigan v Robyn Birdsong*.

Photo by Lech Tremonti

Washtenaw County Project can be found on the "A Lawyer Helps" page of the State Bar website at <http://www.michbar.org/alawyerhelps>.

Also of special note is the effort of lawyers and judges in the southwest corner of the state who worked for two weeks with teachers and high-school students in St. Joseph and Benton Harbor. Now in its second year, the "Educating for Everyday Democracy: The Jury Process" program culminated with a joint school visit to the jury room in the courthouse to replicate the experience of being called to jury duty. And kudos to the Macomb County Bar, which made a YouTube recording of its first-ever Constitution Day program, available at <http://www.macombbar.org>.

It is daunting to contemplate the number of hours the honorees at the Annual Meeting have spent during their lifetimes serving others. To me, they are the stars of our profession. How did they become stars? One project, one kind gesture, one pro bono case, one serving moment at a time. Any-

one can do it, and it's never too late to start. These stars have no more hours in a day than anyone else. Every lawyer who spent one hour in a classroom on Constitution Day seized a valuable opportunity to serve our profession, educate children, and improve the image of lawyers in their communities. Opportunities to lead are all around us, even if we have to create them ourselves. Stars are born one public service hour at a time in places like sixth-grade classrooms on Constitution Day.

If you have not yet done any public service work for your local or state bar, you are missing out on the fulfillment and joy that comes from the gratitude, hugs, smiles, and appreciation that are the paycheck for the work. While leadership is not to be undertaken for personal gain but rather for the positive difference it makes in our world, being known as someone who cares about others is certain to make a positive difference in your personal life. I exhort each and every member of our bar, without qualification, to watch for opportunities like Constitution Day to serve our profession and communities. To those who are already helping others—including bar association, school, church, and community nonprofit volunteers as well as our Annual Meeting honorees—thank you for your fruitful efforts to make a positive difference, one moment at a time. ■



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