

Creative Giving: The Bounty of the Barrister's Ball

By Martha D. Burkett

"There seemed no other cause that could possibly impact the students, legal community, and general community in any better way. The Richard Steinberg Memorial Treatment Fund is exactly the type of resource that student advocates hope to see continue and thrive."

—Diana Miers

2009 Chair, Grand Rapids Cooley
Student Bar Association

On October 16, the Student Bar Association (SBA) of the Thomas M. Cooley Law School Grand Rapids campus held its annual Barrister's Ball benefitting the State Bar of Michigan Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program (LJAP)/Brighton Hospital Richard Steinberg Memorial Treatment Fund. The Steinberg Memorial Treatment Fund is held at Brighton Hospital and assists lawyers and judges who are in need of but unable to pay for treatment.

It was a crisp and colorful October evening, the sun just setting on the splendid landscape of Frederik Meijer Gardens as the festivities began. The extraordinary and delightful Chihuly blown glass exhibit was artfully integrated among the flora and fauna, indoors and out, creating an atmosphere of magic for this very special occasion.

Students and staff turned out in their most elegant attire, the room literally sparkling with enthusiasm and excitement. Our party—comprised of me and my significant other, Bruce Conybeare Sr., and the Hon. Wallace Kent and his wife, Cathy—was greeted by a charming young lady named Allison Johnson, the incoming chair of the SBA. After enjoying tasty hors d'oeuvres and refreshments, Ms. Johnson graciously escorted us to our table of honor, front and center of the podium, from which I would later address the benefactors of the Steinberg Memorial Treatment Fund.

We enjoyed sharing conversation with two young couples who joined us for din-

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ner, three of whom were law students and the other a medical student. It was refreshing to observe the exuberance of this foursome on the veritable cusp of what I hope will be happy, healthy lives and satisfying careers. During dinner, Ms. Johnson apprised me that, thus far, the SBA had raised over \$1,500 for the Steinberg Memorial Treatment Fund. Subsequently, I have learned that the total amount raised for the fund was \$2,137. Amazing.

When it was time for me to address these young benefactors and their more mature teachers and mentors, I had an idea of what I wanted to say, but it did not seem that words would be enough. How could I adequately express my gratitude to these students, faculty, and staff members for choosing the LJAP and the Steinberg Memorial Treatment Fund as recipients of their generosity? It was humbling and gratifying to note that indeed I could not! This remark-



Immediate past LJAC Chair Hon. Wallace Kent Jr. and his wife, Cathy

Courtesy photo

able, collective act of kindness made me feel, in the moment, that the work of the LJAP and the Lawyers and Judges Assistance Committee was coming to fruition in a new and wonderful way. The SBA's decision to honor the Steinberg Memorial Treatment Fund in this manner was exemplary of my holistic view of judicial, attorney, and student wellness—the notion of connectedness to one another and the catalytic nature of human relationships being at the center of that view. I was awed to think that their decision was indicative of an elusive yet long-desired paradigm shift within the legal culture recognizing that showing vulnerability is acceptable and asking for help is desirable.

It was thrilling and validating for me to realize that this paradigm might become the norm of a new generation. ■

Martha D. Burkett is the program administrator for the State Bar of Michigan Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program. Ms. Burkett has completed her master's degrees in public administration and counseling education, and is both a licensed professional counselor and a nationally certified counselor. She has completed graduate certification in holistic health and has achieved level II certification in addictions counseling. She is certified as an advanced-level board certified interventionist and as an approved clinical supervisor.