



Irish Lawyers Pack 50,000th Box of Food for Focus Hope

Group Challenges Other Bar Associations to “Battle of the Boxes”

Irish lawyers are faster and better at doing charity work than lawyers of any other descent. At least that’s what Charles Rutherford, past president of the Incorporated Society of Irish American Lawyers (the Irish Lawyers Association), suggested during the association’s biannual trip to Focus Hope, where dozens of volunteers packed 3,145 boxes of nonperishable food items for homebound seniors—a new one-day record. In addition to setting the record, the group, which started the tradition in November 2001, also packed its 50,000th box, an unprecedented accomplishment according to Focus Hope’s volunteer coordinator.

Rutherford, who retired from Dykema in 2009, was speaking tongue-in-cheek, of course, but he praised the Irish Lawyers’ charitable nature and strong work ethic and threw down the gauntlet to all other special-purpose bar associations.

“We challenge any of the other bar groups to a contest at Focus Hope,” he said. “We’ll each take a conveyor belt and see who can pack more boxes of food in three hours.”

Michigan Court of Appeals Judge Michael Riordan, also a past president of the association, said the Polish Lawyers accepted a similar challenge several years ago and battled valiantly.

“The Polish Lawyers came up a little short, but have indicated they want a rematch,” he said, noting that he welcomes the challenge.

Riordan said the serious-but-friendly competition promotes camaraderie and fellowship and results in more boxes for those in need. He also said it demonstrates the Irish Lawyers’ commitment to diversity.

“You don’t have to be Irish to be part of our group or volunteer with our group,” he said. “We’re open to everyone. You just have to want to help.”

Riordan’s wife, Meghan, the association’s president-elect, said the group’s primary goal is charity, but noted that promoting a sense of community and getting young people involved is equally important.

“Our goal was, and is, to give back,” she said. “But this also bridges the generation gap and helps instill a sense of charity in our youth.”

Tom Myers, another past president of the group and this year’s recipient of the Charles Rutherford Jr. Service Award (named after Rutherford’s son, who was lost in a boating incident on Lake Huron in 2005), agreed, noting that the synergy of the group depends

Photos by Frank Weir



The Irish Lawyers commemorate the packing of their 50,000th box of food for Focus Hope.

To join, volunteer, or challenge the Irish Lawyers, visit <http://irish-lawyers.org> or call (586) 468-2940.

Lawyers make a difference for people and society. They solve problems, provide free legal help to the poor, and give time to many other community efforts.



Retired U.S. District Judge
Paul V. Gadola

on youth participation. Myers also handles the association's annual Thomas P. Thornton Scholarship, a \$1,500 scholarship given to a third-year law student of Irish descent who meets certain criteria.

Judge Riordan said the Focus Hope project began in 2001 as a collaboration between the Irish Lawyers and the Catholic Lawyers Association. He credited several distinguished lawyers for getting the project off the ground, including Judge Paul Gadola, who Riordan said has been passionately dedicated to the project since day one.

"Judge Gadola was at the initial meeting with Eleanor Josaitis to discuss volunteer opportunities and was so enthused at the conclusion of the meeting that he wanted to start working right away," he said. "For many years, he drove down from Flint twice a year to lead the charges and he always stuck around for the

celebratory pizza luncheons at the 6 Mile and Conant Buddy's Pizza afterward."

Since the project's inception, the group has packed approximately 53,145 boxes of food. With an average weight of 35 pounds per box, the group has delivered more than 1.8 million pounds (or 900 tons) of food to homebound seniors.

"That's more than the weight of every Irish lawyer combined," Riordan joked.

The group meets twice a year—every May and November—and packs boxes for approximately three hours. Volunteers line up along two conveyor belts and pack the boxes, which are loaded onto flats and transported to the front of the warehouse for pickup. The boxes are then delivered by school, church, and community volunteer groups.

Dennis Clark, the association's current president, said the Focus Hope program and the Irish Lawyers continue to grow in strength and numbers. He attributed their success to strong communication, attractive events and activities, and great chemistry.

Judge Riordan agreed, adding that, while Irish lawyers love to help, they also know how to have a good time—a true recipe for success. ■



Detroit attorney Jennifer Cupples works on the packing assembly line.



Service project founders include, left to right, Charles Rutherford, Thomas Myers, and Hon. Michael Riordan. Not pictured: Hon. Paul Gadola.