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Service Above Self

For most of us the holidays are a time for reflection and thanksgiving. Families and friends gather together to enjoy a reprieve from the pressures of the workplace and to appreciate the blessings bestowed upon us by virtue of living in a free country. The holiday season also offers the opportunity for lawyers to consider the many advantages we have and the major role played by so many members of our profession in assuring them. A little time spent in recollection may be encouraging, if not inspiring.

Consider, for example, the rich tradition of public service by lawyers dating back to the very beginning of our republic. Lawyers such as John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and John Quincy Adams were instrumental in drafting the blueprint for our nation found in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. It is fitting that 18 of the first 25 Presidents of the United States were lawyers, and nine of the 18 Presidents having served during the 20th century were also members of our profession. Our fellow lawyers have consistently served with distinction on a national level throughout our country's history.

We can proudly recall the invaluable contributions made to our national heritage by such lawyer-Presidents as Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin D. Roosevelt,

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and Harry S. Truman. These were lawyer leaders who represented our country during momentous and very difficult times. Each was a wartime President, however, Lincoln has become perhaps the most lasting national symbol of not only what is most admired about our profession, but an abiding commitment to service to others that transcended personal considerations. Would there have been a Gettysburg Address without Abraham Lincoln, let alone an Emancipation Proclamation? Could we now enjoy the many freedoms we often take for granted without the service and self-sacrifice of these distinguished lawyers?

Many in our profession have also been key participants in sustaining the Rule of

of the State Bar of Michigan. Both our current and immediate past governors, Jennifer Granholm and John Engler, are members of our Bar, together with former Michigan Supreme Court Justice, State Bar President, and current ABA President Dennis Archer. And of course, my fellow Grand Rapidian Gerald R. Ford, a long-time member of the State Bar of Michigan, steered our country through one of its darkest periods following the Watergate debacle.

Generous personal service from lawyers throughout Michigan and elsewhere does not stop with governmental or professional associations, but extends throughout our communities on many levels. I am reminded of the life-long commitment of past State Bar

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Law upon which our nation is founded. From John Marshall to Warren Burger, from Felix Frankfurter to Thurgood Marshall, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Charles Evans Hughes, Benjamin Cardozo, Roscoe Pound, and Learned Hand, to name merely a few, these Supreme Court Justices have presided over some of the most compelling cases in U.S. history. Would the Rule of Law and the many personal freedoms we enjoy today persist without their collective contributions?

We lawyers from Michigan can also take pride in the commitment to public service afforded by so many outstanding members

President John W. Cummiskey, for whom the annual State Bar of Michigan Pro Bono Award is named. John worked tirelessly to encourage lawyers to devote their time and financial resources to assuring that all of our citizens will have access to our justice system, regardless of their level of affluence. For many years, John worked with the Bar's Foundation and Executive Director Linda Rexer to develop the resources necessary to provide legal services for low-income people throughout Michigan.

Our profession lost one of its truly great heroes when John W. Cummiskey passed

away in November of 2002. Fortunately, a few years earlier another past State Bar President, Al Butzbaugh, shared a vision with other Bar officers that led to the development of the annual Access to Justice Campaign. In the last five years, lawyers throughout Michigan have donated their time and efforts on behalf of Access to Justice to solicit contributions from hundreds of other lawyers, non-lawyers, and businesses, which have resulted in contributions and pledges exceeding \$4 million. These funds are utilized throughout the state to provide legal services for the poor. Concurrently, many local bar associations, law firms, and solo practitioners have contributed thousands of hours of free services to those in need of legal assistance that they cannot afford.

I have had the great good fortune to have been a member for many years of the Grand Rapids Chapter of Rotary International. This is an organization with members throughout

the world devoted to humanitarian service, good will, and peace in the world community. The principle motto of Rotary is *Service Above Self*. Fittingly, Rotary was founded in 1905 by a lawyer, Paul Harris. During my tenure as a member and officer of this organization, I continue to be impressed by the way in which its members exemplify that motto, not only in my own community, but in communities of the more than 29,000 Rotary Chapters throughout the world. It is gratifying that in Grand Rapids, and in most other chapters, lawyers comprise one of the largest membership groups.

As we lawyers reflect upon the past and ponder the future, we can take great pride in being members of such a helping and still noble profession. Although we sometimes suffer in the comparative public eye, there is no shortage of inspirational examples of lawyers providing public service. I would urge each of our members to take a little time to

appreciate just how much it means to be a lawyer and to be able to practice law in a democratic society subject to the Rule of Law. At the same time, think about the innumerable contributions of lawyers to the betterment of our society and try to make a point to share some of our storied history with your family and friends. In doing so, perhaps you will find another way to contribute your own "service above self."

I wish a joyful, prosperous and safe holiday season to all of our State Bar members and staff and hope, as you embark upon the new year, that you will each draw inspiration from the examples of service above self set by numerous lawyers and judges who practice in our midst. The next time someone may disparage our profession in your presence, take heart that we have so many positive influences from our number, and it wouldn't hurt to remind the maligners of all that we do that is good. ♦

