

# State Bar Honors 2005 Award Recipients

The State Bar of Michigan will host a Distinguished Service Awards Luncheon, Friday, September 23, from noon to 1:30 p.m. at the Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center to honor the recipients of its major awards. The event is being held in conjunction with the Bar's 70th Annual Meeting in East Lansing.

The State Bar of Michigan's highest and most prestigious honor, the Roberts P. Hudson award, will be presented to a former president of the organization, Stephen C. Bransdorfer, and to Judge Cynthia D. Stephens of the Third Circuit Court.

The Hudson award is presented for the "unselfish rendering of outstanding and unique service to and on behalf of the State Bar of Michigan, the legal profession and the public," and is awarded to the member who "best exemplifies that which brings honor, esteem and respect to the legal profession."

Stephen Bransdorfer has practiced law for almost 50 years. His distinguished legal career includes two tours in the U.S. Department of Justice in Washington, D.C.



*Stephen Bransdorfer*

The first stint included an assignment in Little Rock, Arkansas, during the school desegregation battle. Bransdorfer was a Justice Department spokesman during the legal fight. He served as deputy assistant attorney general from 1989 to 1993 during George H.W. Bush's presidency. Prior to assuming that position, he was in private practice in Grand Rapids, focusing on civil litigation. He was a zealous advocate for his clients and was regarded as one of the best trial attorneys in the West Michigan area. His success rate in complicated litigation matters reflected his individual talent as well as his ability to achieve the necessary teamwork among his associates. In 1993, he formed a

law firm with his sons and later served as a neutral facilitator and arbitrator until his retirement in September 2003.

Bransdorfer incorporated service to the profession early in his career, serving and chairing the Young Lawyers Section from 1963 to 1964. Thirty years later, he chaired the Senior Lawyers Section. In between, among many other activities and responsibilities, he was a member of the Board of Commissioners from 1968 to 1975 and president of the Bar from 1974 to 1975. Mr. Bransdorfer has been a much-respected mentor, teacher, and role model for young lawyers with whom he worked. He shared his experience by active involvement and leadership in many groups and organizations.

The Honorable Cynthia D. Stephens currently serves as a judge of the Third Circuit Court in Detroit. Appointed to the court in 1985, she has served as its Chief Judge Pro Tempore



*Hon. Cynthia D. Stephens*

and as chair of the Mediation Tribunal Association. Much of her time has been devoted to improving the quality of justice. She brings a deep vision and keen intelligence to her work in this arena, and is an outstanding leader in the State Bar's efforts to promote the effective delivery of high quality legal services to all Michigan citizens.

Judge Stephens has been a member of the State Bar's Board of Commissioners for a total of 20 years. Through Supreme Court appointments she has served on task forces and commissions, including the Alternative Dispute Resolution Committee, Prison Over-Crowding Commission, and Race and Ethnic Bias Task Force. She has won numerous awards and is an officer in many legal organizations. She has written articles on subjects from jury selection to judicial selection, and is also a contributing author to a text used to

train law enforcement officers. She was also instrumental in bringing the successful National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Legal System to Michigan in 2003 as a State Bar-hosted national event. Her work to improve the justice system continues as she co-chairs the Standing Committee on Justice Initiatives. She is a special liaison to the Committee's Planning Workgroup, forging a three-to-five-year strategic plan for the justice initiatives work at the Bar. Judge Stephens been instrumental in shaping justice initiatives at the Bar, and has also generously participated in national gatherings to share Michigan's work in this area.

United States Congressman John D. Dingell, who has served the people of Michigan for 50 years, is the 2005 recipient of the State Bar's Frank J. Kelley Public Service Award. This award recognizes extraordinary governmental service by a member of the Bar.



*John D. Dingell*

Representative Dingell has authored numerous pieces of federal legislation that have impacted nearly every facet of American public policy. He has devoted his career to the needs of working families by focusing on expanding access to affordable, quality legal services and healthcare, protecting American jobs, guarding taxpayers' wallets by holding government bureaucrats and contractors accountable, and protecting consumers from unsafe products, unfair practices, and corporate abuses. He is also a well-known advocate for senior citizens, a staunch supporter of civil liberties, and an ardent defender of the Constitution.

Over the last five decades, Congressman Dingell has written some of the best-known laws protecting our health and environment. One notable example is the 1990 Clean Air

Act, which is credited with cleaning up the air we breathe, while preserving American competitiveness. His recent accomplishments include authoring the Do Not Call legislation and taking the lead in getting it passed, as well as co-authoring and helping to get anti-spam and broadcast decency legislation passed. An avid conservationist and outdoorsman, Congressman Dingell successfully passed legislation to create North America's first international wildlife refuge, protecting thousands of acres of natural habitat in Southeast Michigan and Canada.

Before his election as a member of Michigan's Congressional Delegation, he worked as a Congressional employee, then as a forest ranger and a prosecuting attorney for Wayne County. He served in the U.S. Army during World War II and began his career on Capitol Hill in 1955. December 13, 2005 will mark Congressman Dingell's 50th anniversary in the U.S. House.

Janet E. Findlater of Ypsilanti, Jean Ledwith King of Ann Arbor, the Hon. William G. Schma of Kalamazoo, the Hon. Craig S. Strong of Detroit, and Eugene G. Wanger of Lansing have been named recipients of the State Bar of Michigan's 2005 Champion of Justice Award. The John W. Cummiskey Award winner is Nelson Miller of Grand Haven. The Liberty Bell Award will be presented to six coaches from Michigan's 3rd Congressional District.

Janet Findlater, an associate professor at Wayne State University Law School for 28 years, is being honored with a Champion of Justice Award for her role as an extraordinary teacher and legal scholar with a national and international reputation in the area of domestic violence and foster care. She has been named the law school's Professor of the Year 14 times. She is the co-author of a text on domestic violence that has been described as "an absolute model of clarity in both thought and exposition," that has helped spread the word about the long-term problems caused by domestic violence and the importance of early inter-



Janet E. Findlater

Photo by Rick Bielaczyc

vention. Findlater sits on many committees and is a member of the National Advisory Council of the National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women. She also contributes her time to extensive pro bono work.

Jean Ledwith King is recognized for promoting equality in the democratic process in employment, schools, and the courts. Founder of the Women's Caucus of the Michigan Democratic Commission, the first organization of its kind, and Focus on Equal Employment for Women, King was instrumental in bringing a 1971 lawsuit against the University of Michigan, forcing it to address discriminatory issues, particularly in regard to women. In 1972, she argued that the Democratic Party was violating the McGovern-Fraser rules, and was successful in getting 11 women added to the Michigan delegation to the Democratic National Convention. A legal instructor at Wayne State University Law School, Eastern Michigan University, Washenaw Community College, and U of M Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations, King is a frequent speaker on Title IX issues, as well as a highly successful litigator. She is a member of the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame.

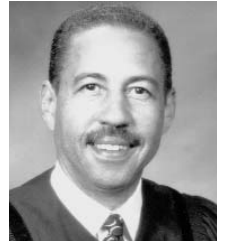
The Honorable William G. Schma is being honored for his leadership in creating drug courts throughout Michigan and the nation. He has been a prime mover in bringing the concept of therapeutic justice into the courts in this country and abroad. Judge Schma is a founding member of both the national and Michigan chapters of the Association of Drug Court Professionals. He has been instrumental in the creation of the Drug Treatment Court Foundation of Kalamazoo County. As a result of his leadership and actions, the Foundation has received \$1.5 million dollars in contributions that will help provide the necessary treatment to participants in the drug courts in Kalamazoo County. His ac-



Jean Ledwith King

complishments have been achieved while handling all of his normal responsibilities as a circuit court judge in Kalamazoo County, a visiting circuit court judge in surrounding counties, and serving on the Michigan Court of Appeals by assignment.

The Hon. Craig S. Strong is recognized for his work as a jurist known for his participation in professional, civic, and charitable organizations, and for his international efforts on behalf of greater understanding and democracy. Four months after becoming a lawyer, Strong became an officer of the Wolverine Bar Association and its youngest president at age 30. He later became a founding member of the Association of Black Judges of Michigan, and served as its president. He was also a member of the National Bar Association's delegation to South Africa, helping develop the International Black Bar Association and serving on the Supreme Court of South Africa. In 1997, Judge Strong was instrumental in the establishment of the nation's largest African American History Museum in Detroit, and has been honored with their Outstanding Museum Service Award for his extensive fundraising efforts.



Hon. Craig S. Strong

Eugene G. Wanger is being honored for his devotion to upholding Michigan's long-time public policy of opposition to the death penalty, and he is regarded as the state's leading opponent of capital punishment. As the youngest Republican delegate to the Michigan Constitutional Convention in 1961, Wanger authored the state's constitutional prohibition of the death penalty. At the time of the Convention's 40th anniversary reunion in 2001, a conference room in the state's newest office building, Constitution Hall, was named in his honor. He is a past vice-chairman of the Committee on Constitutional Law of the State Bar of Michigan, and his work, "Why We Should Reject Capital Punishment"



Eugene G. Wanger



Hon. William G. Schma

is considered by many to be the definitive piece on this issue.

The John W. Cumiskey Pro Bono Award will be presented to Nelson Miller, an associate professor at the Thomas M. Cooley Law School, Grand Rapids campus. Since 1999, he has helped low income and minority communities in Muskegon, Benton Harbor, and Grand Rapids with their legal needs pro bono. He has served approximately 1,000 individuals. He not only met with clients, but kept records and created a manual and guide to help non-profit centers seek funding and evaluate the needs of their constituents. His actions have helped 48 non-profit organizations to offer recreation, mentoring, housing, and food pantries services to their clients. Miller is also the author of many legal publications, serves on various boards, and is active in the State Bar as a member of the Representative Assembly and the Equal Access Initiative Committee.

Linda K. Rexer of Lansing has been named by the State Bar Representative As-



Nelson Miller

sembly as this year's Michael Franck Award winner, and Leslie C. Curry of Grand Rapids has been selected as the recipient of the Unsung Hero Award. Representative Assembly Chairperson Elizabeth A. Jamieson will present the awards at the State Bar Luncheon Celebration on Thursday, September 22, from noon to 1:30 p.m. at the Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center.

Linda K. Rexer, executive director of the Michigan State Bar Foundation, is honored with the Michael Franck Award for her instrumental leadership of the Bar toward achieving its goal to support and improve access to justice for all. As head of the Bar Foundation since 1987, she has directed it in its mission to provide leadership and funding to improve the justice system by providing access to justice, particularly through civil legal aid for the poor, expansion and improvement of the provider system, and increased public understanding of the law and peaceful resolution of disputes through education, research, and publicity. As executive director, she has spearheaded the Foundation's growth from a small organization that distributed less than \$10,000, to an entity that is now distributing \$8 million annually. Established in 1947, the Foundation has made more than 400 grants and distributed over \$65 million. Rexer has been its leader for nearly all of that work. Her presence undoubtedly influenced the decision to have Interest on Lawyers Trust Account (IOLTA) and Filing Fee funds distributed through the Foundation. In addition, Rexer has been instrumental in improving the delivery of civil legal services to the poor through the development of the *Michigan Plan*. Through her efforts, the State Bar's Access to Justice Campaign, established in 1995, has raised over \$5 million dollars in cash, pledges, and gifts through a statewide fundraising system to support legal aid. Ms. Rexer serves on a task force to revise the ABA Standards for Civil Legal Services to the Poor, and is co-chair of the Technical Assistance Committee to assist IOLTA programs throughout the country.



Linda K. Rexer

Leslie C. Curry, a staff attorney for Western Michigan Legal Services of Grand Rapids, is honored for 25 years of service as "a tireless advocate for the poor, and an irreplaceable



Leslie C. Curry

leader and mentor." Her compassion for her clients and her ability to assist them in a caring and helpful way as they struggle through the emotional difficulties of divorce and custody proceeding is what puts Curry in a class by herself. According to her colleagues, "her dedication to her work representing the otherwise unrepresented in the name of justice is obvious to all who know her." So is her seemingly unending knowledge of Michigan law. Persons with the good fortune of becoming her clients receive the best representation. As the litigation director for Western Michigan Legal Services, she has also mentored countless attorneys throughout her career, not only in the Grand Rapids office, but also in the Kalamazoo, Muskegon, Big Rapids, Holland, and St. Joseph offices. The opportunity to work with Curry is widely regarded by the younger attorneys as the "single best thing about working at Legal Aid." In addition to her work at Legal Aid, Curry is also involved in the Grand Rapids Bar through her participation in the ADR Plan Development Committee, Family Law Section, Pro Bono Committee/Trainer of Pro Bono Attorneys, Law Day Committee, and Jury Representation Committee.

The Liberty Bell Award, given to one or more non-lawyers who have strengthened the effectiveness of the American system of freedom under law, will be presented to six coaches from Michigan's 3rd Congressional District and Kent ISD, organizers of "We the People," an essay competition that helps students understand the Constitution. Award recipients are Carolyn Bolthouse, Comstock Park High School; Pierre Sirois, East Grand Rapids High School; Deb Snow, East Kentwood High School; Tricia Hilgendorf, Tri-Unity Christian High School; Catherine Logsdon, Union High School; and Susan Laninga of Kent ISD. ♦