

M. Promoting Community Service

An important function that professionalism commissions might serve is to promote public service and pro bono work among lawyers. In Georgia, a Community Service Task Force, created in 1996 under the auspices of the Professionalism Commission, sponsored convocations, awards, the publication of a newsletter, and Habitat for Humanity projects, to name a few of its activities. The Task Force adopted its own mission statement, which reflects its goals: "To encourage, support, and recognize within the profession the tradition that all lawyers perform community service and measure their success in ways other than just financial gain." Today many community service activities are sponsored by the State Bar of Georgia, the Young Lawyers Division, and local, specialty and circuit bar associations. The Community Service Task Force has become the Selection Committee for the Justice Robert Benham Awards for Community Service. Now entering its 10th year, the Benham awards are given annually to attorneys and judges in the ten judicial circuits. Those few who have an extraordinarily long record of community service may receive the Lifetime Achievement Award. These awards are considered quite prestigious and draw favorable media attention to the bench and bar and are listed prominently on the recipients' resumes and law firm websites.

In 2007, the Ohio Supreme Court issued a *Statement Regarding Provision of Pro Bono Legal Services by Ohio Lawyers*. This statement encourages all Ohio attorneys to devote professional time and resources and use civic influence to ensure equal access to our system of justice for those who because of economic or social barriers cannot afford or secure legal counsel. Lawyers may search pro bono activities available in Ohio by practice area or geographical location at www.ohioprobono.org. The Supreme Court, in conjunction with the Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation, is developing a way for lawyers to voluntarily and anonymously report their pro bono activities and financial support for legal aid programs.

In Illinois, the Commission contracted a national expert in veterans' legal issues to train lawyers in various organizations. Lawyers participating in the first training made two commitments: 1) to represent Illinois veterans for no cost, or "pro bono" service, and 2) agree to assist in the training of other lawyers across the state, in future training programs organized by the COP and their partner organizations.