EDUCATING THE PUBLIC
ABOUT THE LAW:
GUIDE FOR INDIVIDUAL LAWYERS
Dear colleagues:

As members of the legal profession, we serve as the guardians and caretakers of the American justice system. Our responsibilities include improving public understanding of the justice system and sustaining public confidence in it.

In February 2000, the ABA’s House of Delegates passed the resolution “that the American Bar Association encourages every lawyer to consider it part of his or her fundamental professional responsibility to further the public’s understanding of and confidence in the rule of law and the American system of justice.” This resolution, building upon previous ABA policy statements urging organized bar support for public legal education, provides a specific mandate for individual lawyers to view public legal education as part of their fundamental obligation as members of the profession.

In response to the resolution, the ABA’s Division for Public Education has written this guide for individual lawyers, intended to

- introduce the many opportunities for participating in public legal education,
- provide practical advice on how lawyers can effectively communicate with public audiences,
- identify resources that can assist lawyers in fulfilling this important obligation to the profession and the public it serves,
- highlight existing programs that depend on the contributions of volunteer lawyers, and
- offer the personal insights of legal professionals on the value of public legal education.

Many of the ideas in this guide were provided by schools and organizations that currently offer law-related education and rely upon the efforts of volunteer attorneys. They thus represent real opportunities—and real needs—for the contributions of individual lawyers.

Legal professionals possess a wealth of education, skills, and experience that they can bring to students of all ages, adding immeasurably to the public’s understanding of and respect for our legal system. We hope that you will contribute your time and talents.

Sincerely yours,

Allan J. Tanenbaum, Chair

Standing Committee on Public Education
Why You Should Educate the Public

In 1999, the American Bar Association released the results of a nationwide survey of public perceptions of the U.S. justice system. The results confirmed the need to build public confidence and trust in the justice system through better public understanding. While a solid majority agreed that “the American justice system is still the best in the world,” that positive sentiment was tempered by perceptions of problems in many areas of the justice system. In particular, many participants in the survey had poor perceptions of the legal profession:

- Only 14% were extremely or very confident in the legal profession, while 42% were slightly or not at all confident.
- 43% thought that lawyers do not contribute enough to their community through donations of time, legal services, or money.
- 51% thought we would be better off with fewer lawyers.

The news was not all bad: personal experiences with lawyers were typically quite positive. Seventy-five percent of the people surveyed had used a lawyer in the past five years, and 53% of these individuals were “very satisfied.” In contrast, only 11% were “very dissatisfied” with the services their lawyer provided. Moreover, 61% of the people surveyed wanted to learn more about the justice system, and they wanted to learn it from people most familiar with the law: judges, law-school professors, and lawyers. And the study confirmed that the more people know about the law, the more confidence they have in the legal system and its practitioners.

In a 1999 ABA-sponsored survey of public perceptions of the U.S. justice system:
- 61% expressed a desire to learn more about the justice system.
- 32% said they were extremely or very confident in the judiciary.
- 14% said they were extremely or very confident in the legal profession.

What Is Public Legal Education?

Public legal education encompasses a broad range of activities—from speaking to a classroom of students to participating in an “Ask a Lawyer” call-in program to writing an op-ed piece for your local newspaper. It also includes offering support to the many schools and community-based organizations that are already trying to further public understanding of the law.
Hale and Dorr LLP’s Youth & Education Initiative

“Hale and Dorr” is a phrase often heard in the classrooms and corridors. To students, “Hale and Dorr” means “we’re important, we count—somebody in the tall building downtown thinks we can be successful.” To teachers, it means “we’re appreciated and we’re supported,” and to parents it says, “we’re not alone in trying to help our children achieve their dreams.”

—Cathedral High School, Boston, Massachusetts

Hale and Dorr LLP—with offices in Boston and Waltham, MA; Washington, D.C.; New York, N.Y.; Reston, Va.; and Princeton, N.J.—has made a comprehensive commitment to enhance educational opportunities for children and teens through its Youth & Education Initiative. Seeking to increase the impact of its charitable activities, Hale and Dorr decided to establish focused, long-term partnerships—combining volunteer service and an aggregate $1,125,000 in financial support over three years—with four organizations that serve inner-city youth, from preschoolers to high school seniors.

The Youth & Education Initiative supports Citizen Schools, Cathedral High School, and Teen Empowerment—all located in Boston—and the Boston and Washington, D.C., branches of Jumpstart. Hale and Dorr’s attorneys and staff assist their nonprofit partners by volunteering at learning fairs; hosting summer internships, career days, and college application workshops; and teaching classes that give students their first substantive insight into the law. Through such programs, Hale and Dorr cooperates in the mission to boost child literacy and maximize school-retention rates and college readiness, while potentially increasing the future diversity of the legal field.

Hale and Dorr’s partnership with Citizen Schools is a striking example of volunteer attorneys using their legal training to enhance student appreciation of the law. Citizen Schools is an innovative, hands-on after-school program that unites “Citizen Teachers” with student apprentices. In the ten-week Legal Apprenticeship Program, Hale and Dorr associates teach eight to nine middle school students the basics of litigating a trial. Classes are supplemented by visits from Firm “guest speakers,” including distinguished senior partners. The program culminates in an evening of mock trials, bringing together several Citizen Schools teams, who have worked with Boston law firms, to perform in front of federal and state judges at Boston’s J. Joseph Moakley Federal Courthouse.

The Youth & Education Initiative’s benefits are clearly reciprocal. The organizations enjoy the long-term support of a law firm committed to their success, as well as a reliable source of volunteer lawyers to enhance their programs. Within the Firm, the initiative acts as an “internal glue” among partners, associates, and staff, instilling a collective sense of pride and accomplishment. “I think that we probably get more out of it than the kids do,” says Greta Sobral, a Corporate Department associate. “We get to reconnect to that part of ourselves that we don’t have during the day. As attorneys, we are so used to dealing with adversaries, and our day-to-day lives are very guarded, in a sense. Working with children is an opportunity to speak in a completely different voice.”
Lawyers have many skills—as speakers, writers, scholars, organizers, and leaders—that can strengthen and promote public legal education. You might volunteer to teach a class, serve on a board or committee, act as a mentor, or lead a fund-raising drive. The many opportunities for participating in public legal education include:

- **Elementary and secondary school classrooms**: speaking to social studies, civics, or history classes; participating in school-sponsored mock trial programs.
- **After-school programs**: Volunteering for Boys and Girls Clubs, scouting organizations, YMCA programs, church youth groups, etc.
- **Youth or Teen Courts**: (a nationwide program of community-based courts in which students try and sentence their peers for juvenile offenses, traffic infractions, or school rule violations): volunteering to mentor students, train them for various roles, and help shape the direction and policies of the Youth Court.
- **Colleges and universities**: guest lecturing, career counseling, participating in law-school based programs.
- **Community organizations**: leading a discussion group or teaching a course at a library, community college, or university extension program.
- **State and local bar associations**: volunteering through one of the many state, county, and city bar associations that support public education activities relying upon the volunteer efforts of members.
- **Workplaces**: offering brown-bag lunch talks on practical law issues (wills, buying a home, credit and bankruptcy, etc.).
- **Media outlets**: writing newspaper op-ed pages, appearing on radio and television call-in shows, doing media interviews on law-related topics, putting on law-related community film festivals.
- **Senior centers**: presenting a workshop on health care advance planning or estate planning.
- **Your law practice or firm**: inviting student groups to observe a trial or visit your office; writing general interest articles for your firm’s Web site.
One evening several years ago my youngest son Dan noticed I was getting dressed up and asked where I was going. I told him I was giving a speech to some people and he asked why they wanted to hear me. “Because,” I found myself saying, “outside this house there are lots of people who think I’m pretty important.”

Actually, a lot of people who don’t know us very well do think we judges are pretty important and are eager to have us explain pressing issues affecting their often puzzling legal system to them. We should be even more eager to do it.

Relatively few of our citizens serve on juries, and fewer still get a well-rounded view of our entire justice system, its strengths and needs. A judge who can deliver informative, interesting, well-prepared programs dealing with the workings and problems of our legal system has a powerful educational tool for good. Such programs can put a human face on the judiciary and give people a feel for their own courts and judges. They can allow for questions to be answered and misunderstandings to be cleared up. They also have the potential to deliver a positive, constructive, and useful message that has not been filtered or distorted by mistake or malice.

Some things need more than a sound bite or bumper sticker to be adequately explained. And there is nothing like the opportunity for good old-fashioned human interaction to resolve many problems. We have a lot of support for our system of justice in our citizenry, notwithstanding the frequent criticism, sometimes well justified, that is heard. Active discussion, debate and criticism is the life blood of self-government. That’s a big reason why we have the First Amendment. But it needs to be informed. As judges, it is not only our duty, but it is to everyone’s long term best interest, that we go to the people and explain how our system works, and how it could work better. We are the best ones to do it. And if we don’t, who will?
How Do I Get Started?

Many organizations that provide public legal education depend on or would like to recruit the services of volunteer lawyers. Here are a few ways to initiate contact:

- Contact your state and local bar organizations, which typically offer public education programs throughout the year (including Law Day and Law Week activities). Many also maintain lawyer referral services and speaker bureaus, organized by specialty, which could direct interested organizations to you.

- Volunteer your services to an organization that provides public legal education programs to audiences you are interested in.

- Contact the principal of your local elementary or secondary school and express your willingness to speak to social studies, civics, or history classes.

- Consider how your current business development activities might include a public education component: e.g., writing articles for a law-firm Web site that are addressed and available to a general audience; providing brown-bag lunch talks for employees of a corporate client.

So You’ve Been Asked to Speak

Making an oral presentation to a classroom or community group is one of the most common methods of providing public legal education. While many lawyers are accomplished public speakers, not all are familiar with addressing audiences in an educational environment. Here are four steps to help ensure that your presentation is a success.

Four Steps to a Successful Presentation

- Identify your audience: who, where, and why.

- Identify the key ideas you want to convey, focusing on one or two concepts.

- Prepare your presentation: plan ways to engage your audience.

- Evaluate your effectiveness.
Guided by the belief that knowledge of the justice system is essential for residents to function effectively in our democracy, the Washington State Bar Association (WSBA) has adopted a “cradle to grave” approach to public legal education through its Council on Public Legal Education. Most of the Council’s work is done by volunteer lawyers and judges working in partnership with educators, journalists, community leaders, and others.

The Council serves as a clearinghouse for various programs needing the assistance of volunteer lawyers, including a People’s Law School for the general public, a Street Law program pairing law-student teachers with high school classrooms, and the Young Lawyers Division’s Pre-Law Student Leadership Conference. Through WSBA publications and its Web site, volunteers are solicited to participate in these programs.

The Council also develops its own programs through four committees, including

The Community Committee, which develops content for a legal education Web site, assists organizations in creating educational materials for the public, and organizes legal education workshops for public and elected officials.

The Education Committee, which promotes legal education in K–12 classrooms and higher education by developing and publicizing curriculum materials and sponsoring training sessions and conferences.

The Media Committee, which is planning a legal resource guide and workshops for journalists.

The Formal Legal Process Committee, which seeks to improve information provided to users of the legal system by surveying them about their experiences.

Many of the Council’s programs could be replicated in your local community. For example, the Council is currently planning a “Legal Film Festival,” which will screen popular movies depicting aspects of the American legal system, followed by lively discussions led by volunteer attorneys, judges, and community members. And volunteer WSBA members are creating a public information Web site that will help visitors locate information on a variety of legal and government topics.

Jan Eric Peterson, President of the WSBA, gives lawyers this call to action: “The pledge of allegiance promises liberty and justice for all. Justice is that important. A public educated about the justice system is essential for the survival of our constitutional democracy. It is our profession’s duty to see it is done. Get out there and spread the word.”
So You’ve Been Asked to Speak

Identify Your Audience

Before you plan your presentation, ask questions about the group you will address:

- Who will be in the audience—age, background, etc.?
- Interests of the group: which topics would particularly appeal to your audience?
- How many people will be present at your talk?
- Where will the talk be given (a classroom, a lecture hall, a community center, a banquet hall)?
- How much time will you have to speak (remember to leave sufficient time for questions and answers and audience evaluation)?
- What technical resources, such as audiovisual equipment, are available for the presentation?
- Will the audience have any prior knowledge of your topic?

Identify the Key Ideas You Want to Convey

- For most audiences, your focus should be one or two key concepts or legal principles.
- Remember that you will be introducing—not exhaustively covering—the ideas you present.
- Select ideas that can be illustrated with anecdotes or examples.
- Ensure that the topics you address are appropriate to the age and interests of your audience.

Prepare Your Presentation

Involve the audience. It is well established that active learners retain much more information than do passive learners. Strategies for audience involvement include

- An opinion poll or a true/false quiz. Questions and audience responses can then form the basis for the presentation.
- Breaking audiences into small groups to discuss issues involved in your presentation. Reconvene the audience to discuss individual group responses.
- Using a mock trial or legislative hearing format, with members of the group acting out appropriate roles.
I am beginning my fourth year as a Coordinator for the Warren County Teen Court Program. Through this and other volunteer activities I seek to make meaningful professional contributions to society at large and particularly to my local community. The efforts that I devote to these projects are returned to me in the form of a deeper appreciation of my profession, a heightened awareness of the power of committed individuals to make a difference, and a greater recognition of the gifts of others.

The juvenile defendants who are tried in Teen Court have either pled guilty or been found guilty by the district court judge. The role of Teen Court is to impose the appropriate constructive sentence upon the young person. High school students serve as prosecution attorneys, defense attorneys, clerks, bailiffs, and perhaps most importantly, as jurors in actual trials of first time, nonviolent juvenile offenders. The foundational objective of Teen Court is to reduce the incidence of recidivism, and objective evidence has thus far validated the thesis that judgment by one’s peers is particularly effective upon teens. The program works.

Teen Court members are trained by volunteers to serve in each role in the courtroom. It is rewarding to teach these young people how to serve as effective advocates, and even more inspirational to see them rise to the challenge of a particular case. In the process I become a better advocate as well. Few things hone skills better than trying to teach them to someone else. Likewise, few things better develop humility than trying to keep up with (much less a step ahead of!) a group of sharp teens.

My life is enriched by these volunteer activities. I encourage you to likewise become involved in a program in which you can apply your professional training. The perspective gained will help reinvigorate you to meet the challenges of our profession.
So You’ve Been Asked to Speak

- Brainstorming sessions. These sessions will give you a sense of your audience's opinions and ideas, which can then form the basis of your discussion.

- Audiovisual materials, sample legal documents, or other handouts. They add variety to your presentation and help the audience follow along.

Avoid professional jargon. Describe legal concepts with clear definitions that use everyday language.

Tailor your material to your audience. What interests a group of 16 year olds may not interest a senior citizens’ group. Select material that will be relevant to the concerns of your audience.

Illustrate your points using hypothetical cases or actual anecdotes. They will help the audience see how abstract legal principles are applied to actual circumstances.

Respect your audience’s abilities. You may be surprised by how much your audience already knows and how willingly it rises to a challenge.

Be honest with your audience—don’t be afraid to admit you don’t know the answer to a question. Your audience will respect your honesty.

Convey your enthusiasm for the subject.

Be flexible. Be willing to let your discussion lead the presentation in unanticipated, potentially meaningful directions.

Pay attention to time. Make every effort to arrive on time for your presentation and stay within the time allotted to you.

Evaluate Your Effectiveness

Asking your audience to evaluate your presentation will help you learn how effectively your message was communicated and will help you improve future presentations. Evaluations can include

- A printed form completed by audience members.
- A conversation with the classroom teacher or program organizer after your presentation.
- Self-critique of your presentation.
DuPage County’s Juvenile Justice Diversion Program

Started in 1997, the Juvenile Diversion Program in DuPage County, Illinois, demonstrates how volunteer lawyers can effect real change in the lives of youth at risk. To date, about 40 DuPage County Bar Association (DCBA) lawyer volunteers have instructed 128 teens ages 13 through 17 on how to avoid repeat offenses, while helping them develop key life skills through real-life experiences and volunteer community service.

The Juvenile Diversion Program provides another example of community collaboration. The DCBA was approached by the Boy Scouts of America—Three Fires Council to partner on a program that would offer first-time juvenile offenders an alternative to the traditional juvenile justice system. The DCBA recruits volunteer leaders of the teen groups from its membership while the Three Fires Council oversees administration of the program. The volunteer lawyers lead groups that meet twice each month for five months, with individual sessions covering topics from learning to respond to anger to understanding and responding to the feelings of others. The groups also take a field trip to the county jail where, through talks with inmates, the teens learn the eventual likelihood and realities of incarceration should they continue to violate the law.

The program also enjoys the support of DuPage County’s judicial system, probation department, and county board. The judges refer teens to the program and, if they successfully graduate, the department of probation clears their record. Successful graduation depends on full attendance at program sessions, completion of forty hours of community service, and the accumulation of additional credits through homework assignments and additional volunteer activities. The county board has provided funding for the program and promoted it to the community.

Ron Wentzell, Senior Diversion Executive for the Three Fires Council, believes the DCBA volunteer lawyers are a key part of the program’s success. “The lawyers have a much better understanding of the court system and the consequences the teens will face if they go back into the system. Follow-up studies of graduates show that 80 percent have maintained clean records after completing the program. The teens are clearly getting the message from their group leaders.”

An additional benefit is the long-term relationships many of the DCBA volunteers have formed with teens in the program. As Wentzell notes, “A mentoring relationship often develops between the lawyers and the kids, and some have lasted for several years now. The kids know they have a place to call if they’re in trouble and someone who will listen to them.”

For more information on the DuPage County Juvenile Diversion Program, see www.dcba.org/legal/jdp.htm
Resources You Can Use

The ABA Division for Public Education has an extensive Web site on volunteering for public education. Access www.abanet.org/publiced/volunteer for a wide range of information that will help you whether you’re working with school children or the adult public. It has everything from talking points to sample evaluation forms, and its links are a good way to learn about public education efforts all over the country.

The other Web sites and resources profiled are more targeted to particular activities and contain plenty of information on volunteer opportunities, in a wide range of programs for youths and adults.

Youth Education

The American Bar Association’s Division for Public Education maintains a comprehensive Web site on law-related education at www.abanet.org/publiced/youth/. There you can find information about volunteer opportunities in education from kindergarten through high school, as well as links to state and national programs, publications, and resources.

Among the excellent national law-related education projects:

The Center for Civic Education www.civiced.org/ for a very wide ranging program with many opportunities for lawyers and judges to volunteer at every grade level, as well as dozens of sample lessons.

Constitutional Rights Foundation www.crf-usa.org/ to learn about lawyer in the classroom programs and select from a wide range of lessons you can use.

The Constitutional Rights Foundation-Chicago www.crfc.org for information on volunteering in elementary schools, lessons on juries, materials in Spanish, and more.

Street Law www.streetlaw.org/ for information about programs in schools and the community, mock trials, and more.

www.abanet.org/publiced/lre/main.html for a comprehensive list of state and national programs, many linked directly to helpful Web sites containing materials and projects you can use in reaching out to student groups.
Southern Methodist University Dedman School of Law’s Law-Related Education Program

Dedman School of Law at Southern Methodist University is one of several law schools around the country that require all students to complete a law-related public service component prior to graduation. These programs are particularly valuable in instilling a sense of public service as a fundamental professional responsibility at the beginning of a lawyer’s career. At SMU, students complete thirty hours of public service during their law school years, and a popular program for fulfilling these hours is the school’s Law-Related Education (LRE) program with Dallas Independent School District (DISD) fifth grade social studies classes.

The LRE program was proposed in 1994 by the Phi Alpha Delta Legal Fraternity. An advisory committee comprising representatives from Phi Alpha Delta, the Dallas Bar Association, the DISD, and Dedman School of Law administrators developed and approved the inaugural program. The Dallas Bar Foundation provided assistance for initial program costs, with subsequent funding from Dr Pepper/Seven Up.

The program’s focus is on developing active citizenship skills and providing sound decision-making tools before a crisis arises. Forty law students work in pairs to teach ten class sessions over two semesters, addressing topics including lawmaking and the Bill of Rights, the structure and process of the American court system, respect for property and persons, and freedom of expression.

Fifth-grade classrooms have been an excellent audience for the LRE program. The students are mature enough to understand abstract concepts and to use the information they learn to formulate their own perceptions of the law. The LRE program is a preventive law program, and by encouraging fifth-graders to respect individual rights and take responsibility for personal actions, the program provides skills that prepare students for some of the challenges they may face in middle school and high school. Classroom activities explore making wise choices on topics relevant to the students’ age group, with lessons ranging from gangs to the election process.

The LRE program has also been adapted by various SMU law-student groups. The Black Law Students’ Association (BLSA) used the program materials to create an after-school neighborhood program. Si Puedes!, a mentoring organization founded by SMU law students, used the LRE materials in their work with elementary students. And several SMU law-student groups have conducted moot court and mock trial programs for both elementary and high school students.

Comments of SMU law students who have participated in the LRE program testify to its value to both the fifth-graders and their law-student instructors. “LRE was one of the most rewarding things I’ve ever done,” said one law student. “Not only do the kids enjoy the program, but you leave with a feeling that you’ve really made a difference in the kids’ perception of the law,” said another. In other words, as the fifth-graders learn about the law, law students learn what a difference public education can make in their own lives and the lives of those they teach.
Resources You Can Use

Youth Courts

The National Youth Court Center—www.youthcourt.net—is an excellent site offering ideas on training volunteers and links to youth courts around the country.

The ABA Division for Public Education is a clearinghouse of information on youth courts. Their Technical Assistance Bulletin “Youth Courts: A National Movement,” is free. Call 1-800-285-2221 and ask for product code 497-0100. It can also be accessed in its entirely at www.abanet.org/publiced/youth/tab17.html.

Law Day

The major national source of information about Law Day is the ABA site—www.lawday.org—where you’ll find talking points for speeches, lessons for every level of classroom, ideas on how lawyers and judges can reach out to schools and communities, profiles of more than 100 successful programs, and much more.

Legal Careers/Mentoring

The ABA is a new partner in America’s Promise—The Alliance for Youth. Access www.americaspromise.org to find out more about the programs its partners sponsor. America’s Promise is also a partner in Groundhog Job Shadow Day, a great opportunity to educate youth about legal careers. See www.jobshadow.org for more information.

The ABA Division for Public Education offers two publications on legal careers: A Life in the Law (booklet, $2.50 each, Product Code 235-0036) and Legal Careers (brochure, $6.00 per package of thirty, Product Code 235-0035). To order, call 1-800-285-2221 or go to www.abanet.org/store/order.html.

Courts and the Community

Many court systems actively support public education.

The ABA has recently established the Judges Network, an effort to harness the power of successful judicial outreach efforts across the country. Access www.abanet.org/jd/judgesnetwork.html for resources, examples and tips, links, and highlights from pilot programs.
As an African-American attorney, I have always felt the need to make a contribution to those who are less fortunate than I—particularly to the education of disadvantaged children in my community. When I joined International Paper this year, I was pleasantly surprised to find I did not have to make excuses for the hours I spent on projects to aid the local community.

The Company has supported my participation in a plan to open a civil rights museum in Fayette County, Tennessee. The project has given me the opportunity to meet with some of the civil rights pioneers who stood up for their right to vote in spite of economic hardships and fears for their safety and the safety of their children. I am involved in this project because I hope young children will learn lessons from the brave struggle of these unsung heroes.

When Bill Lytton, the Company’s general counsel, asked me to co-chair the Legal Department’s Law Day activities, I took the opportunity to see that reading played a central role in the activities we planned. The Company’s adopted school, Coleman Elementary, needed books for first-, second-, and third-graders in an accelerated reading program. I made arrangements for Company employees to purchase books for the students at a discount from a local bookstore, encouraging employees to purchase both books required for the school’s program and books that reflect the Company’s commitment to diversity. The Legal Department donated more than 250 books to the school and members of the department visited Coleman classrooms to read the books we purchased to the children. We also staged a mock trial—*State of Italia v. Gepetto*—and had a poster contest that allowed sixth-graders to express their creativity around the theme of how the law protects the best interests of children.

Our Legal Department’s commitment to add value to our communities encourages department members to use their skills to make a difference in the lives of our neighbors. We participate in Habitat for Humanity projects during our annual legal conference, sponsor and participate in career days at local schools and colleges, encourage attorneys to accept pro bono cases, and support each other’s involvement in civic and religious organizations.

It is a very empowering feeling when your personal aspirations for community involvement coincide with your employer’s commitments.
Wisconsin has a very active court-outreach program. Their site—www.courts.state.wi.us/media/vol_courts.html—has many ideas for volunteers in such areas as mediation, teen court, and court-appointed special advocates.

*Guide to Educating the Public About the Courts* is an ABA book filled with ideas and profiles of successful programs. Call 1-800-285-2221 to order and ask for product code 235-0025.

*Judicial Outreach on a Shoestring*, a more recent ABA book, offers a variety of doable programs and ideas. Call 1-800-285-2221 to order and ask for product code 523-0048.

**Bar Association Outreach**

Bar associations everywhere support public legal education. To get an idea of the range of activities for volunteers, and the resources available to volunteers, access

www.wsba.org (Web site of the Washington State Bar Association) for a huge range of activities and lessons for Law Week or every week.

www.nysba.org/lyc/LYC.html (Web site of New York State Bar Association Law, Youth, and Citizenship Program) for information about lawyers in the classroom, mock trial tournaments, and teacher training.

www.azbar.org/foundation/lre/lre.htm (Web site of Arizona Bar Foundation) for a wide range of lawyer volunteer activities.

www.pa-bar.org/specialprograms.shtml (Web site of the Pennsylvania Bar Foundation) for all kinds of school programs and lessons, including online registration for Law Day volunteers.

www.texasbar.com/pubint/lre for an introduction to the many Law-Related Education programs offered by the State Bar of Texas.

www.flrea.org, the Florida Law-Related Education Association site, which has information on building successful programs, curricula you can use, ongoing programs, and access to a thriving network of educators and lawyers.

www.isba.org/Sections/lawrelateded.html, for teacher-training materials and information about mock trials, Law Day lessons and activities, and help in teaching about the Illinois Constitution.
Ventura County’s Court and Bar Collaboration

Ventura County, California, is home to a model collaboration between the Ventura County Superior Court and the Ventura County Bar Association (VCBA). Located just northwest of Los Angeles County, Ventura County includes affluent enclaves, retirement communities, and inland agricultural areas with large migrant worker populations. Together, the Superior Court and the VCBA have created numerous legal education programs designed to meet the needs of the County’s diverse population. Through lawyer volunteerism and the support of other community partners, these programs are run at little cost to the Court and VCBA.

In 1999, the Superior Court’s Self-Help Center received funding to purchase a mobile unit that could bring court personnel and volunteer lawyers to communities throughout the County. The unit travels an established circuit each week, including rural Santa Paula; the Salvation Army in Oxnard; Ventura’s Ventura Avenue, which houses other services assisting marginalized individuals; and Thousand Oaks and Ojai, affluent communities whose poorer residents have few services addressed to their needs. Once a month, the unit also travels to Leisure Village, a local retirement community. In 2000, the mobile unit served over 1,200 persons.

Another collaborative effort is “Law Talk,” a biweekly program featuring interviews with volunteer legal specialists that airs on local cable access channels throughout the County. “Law Talk” started as a series Superior Court–produced video programs. After being taken over by the VCBA, the series evolved into the current “Law Talk” format. Matthew P. Guasco, a mediator and appellate attorney who hosts “Law Talk,” is pleasantly surprised by the program’s success. “When we started, we thought of ‘Law Talk’ as a test concept. We had no idea that, two years and 36 programs later, we would be taping two programs every month and airing the program in every city in the County twice per week.”

The VCBA continues to work closely with the court in developing new “Law Talk” programs. Adelphia, a nationwide media corporation that is the local cable television operator, donates its production facilities for taping “Law Talk” and also provides free copies of videotapes for each program that are distributed to the Superior Court’s self-help centers and to County public libraries. Guasco attributes the success of the program to everyone involved. “The bar association, the lawyers who produce and appear on the program, the court, and Adelphia have really come together in the spirit of community volunteerism to create a program which educates and informs the public about the law. It’s that energy, which has made ‘Law Talk’ a success.”

Currently under development are five Spanish-language “Law Talk” programs, several of which will address such consumer-protection issues as landlord/tenant law, immigration services, and the distinction between lawyers and notarios (notary publics, who can perform legal services in Mexico). As Guasco notes, “So often, attorneys are the subject of criticism. ‘Law Talk’ shows the public that lawyers are willing to donate a great deal of their time to do something that helps the community.”
Points of view or opinions in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the American Bar Association.

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