

American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division
The Affiliate

Justin Heather of Chicago Receives 2009 National Outstanding Young Lawyer Award

By M. Vittoria "Giugi" Carminati

He is a smart, hard working, dedicated young lawyer, who takes the time to defend those who cannot defend themselves. He teaches law students, mentors young lawyers, and serves the bar both at the local and national levels. Too much, you say? Well, not for the 2009 ABA YLD National Outstanding Young Lawyer, Justin Heather.

Justin Heather is a litigation associate with the Chicago office of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP. And dropping the name Skadden, Arps should say it all. But Justin defies stereotypes and goes above and beyond what is an extremely demanding practice to improve the lives of others and the bar.

Pro Bono Dedication

Justin has logged over 4,000 pro bono hours since he began practicing eight years ago. He currently represents a client on death row at the Mississippi State Penitentiary in federal habeas corpus proceedings on a case referred by the ABA Death Penalty Project. He serves as counsel to an inmate in § 1983 litigation against prison officials arising out of an incident that caused traumatic injury to the plaintiff-inmate. He also represented a number of other clients on a pro bono basis, including Togolese citizens who suffered political persecution for pro-democracy activities and membership in human rights groups, a death row inmate in federal habeas corpus proceedings in Illinois, and several other clients in race and disability discrimination suits.

Justin, along with David Wolfe and Scott Henry, began a pilot program for low-income senior citizens in Chicago that the ABA YLD will implement on a national basis during the 2010–2011 bar year. That program is now called "Serving Our Seniors." As part of Serving Our Seniors, volunteer attorneys provide basic legal help to seniors by drafting wills and advanced health-care directives. Currently fifteen to twenty lawyers participate, but as Justin Heather explains, "The numbers are going up by the day."

These achievements and his obvious dedication to others should say it all. But again, Justin Heather defies what "should" be enough.

Bar Contributions

In addition to his pro bono work, Justin currently serves as a Vice-Chair of the Chicago Bar Association's Young Lawyers Section, serves on the board of the *CBA Record*, and the Young Professionals Boards of the Chicago Bar Foundation and the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago. He is a Council member of the Illinois State Bar Association Young Lawyers Division. He has published a number of legal articles that have appeared in, among others, the *CBA Record*, the *Illinois Bar Journal*, the *ABA Litigation Ethics Newsletter*, *The Affiliate*, and the *Journal of Law & Politics*. He has received several awards for his legal writing and currently serves as an Assistant Editor for *The Affiliate*. Justin is currently working as the editor of a book on behalf of the ABA Section of Litigation designed to provide women and people of color with insights to help them advance in the legal profession.

In an effort to help other lawyers, Justin serves as a mentor to law students and an informal mentor and confidant for junior lawyers at Skadden. He takes the time to advise both about their legal practices and establishing a solid work-life balance. In addition to his numerous publications, he previously served as an adjunct professor of legal writing at Loyola University School of Law.

When asked why he does it, he credits his father. "It is my obligation as a lawyer and as a human being to help others. It was something engrained in me from early childhood. My father had ruptured disks in his back and one leg, but you could see him every Saturday helping someone who was, in his mind, less fortunate."

Recognition

Justin's achievements have not gone unnoticed. He is the recipient of several awards for his contributions to the legal profession, the organized bar, and the public. He received the 2008 Young Lawyer of the Year Award (Cook County) from the Illinois State Bar Association Young Lawyers Division for his dedication and contribution to the legal profes-

American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division
The Affiliate

sion. He is also the 2007 recipient of The Maurice Weigle Exceptional Young Lawyer Award presented by the Chicago Bar Association and the Chicago Bar Foundation for his service to the legal profession and the community. He has also received numerous pro bono awards from his law firm.

Justin was both humbled and made proud by the ABA YLD's recognition of his efforts. But he also views it as a sign that he has to do more. "It's almost a pay it forward concept. I feel like I should get out there and do more for the community."

Finalists for the 2009 National Outstanding Young Lawyer Award are Keathan Frink of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, and Cheryl Camin of Dallas, Texas. For more information, visit www.abanet.org/yld/awards/noyla.

M. Vittoria "Guigi" Carminati is an Assistant Editor of The Affiliate and a Litigation Associate in the Houston, Texas, office of Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP.
