

American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division
The Affiliate

Affiliate Spotlight: The Alaska Bar Association

By Siobahn Briley

Elizabeth Apostola is the President of the Anchorage Bar Association's Young Lawyers Section. Under Elizabeth's guidance, the Anchorage YLS has blossomed into a vibrant community service and mentoring institution. Its schedule for 2010 included several events each month. For instance, in February, the YLS held a "Welcome Social" for new attorneys, raised money to support stray dogs, provided volunteers to assist at a local homeless shelter, and supported new graduates taking the Alaska bar exam by providing snacks and an after-party.

The section also sponsors a 5K run every year in May, "Race Judicata," the proceeds of which benefit local youth. It also coordinates a Mock Trial competition, the winner of which attends the National Mock Trial Competition. And there is an annual Christmas Party, which benefits Covenant House Alaska, an organization serving homeless youth.

Speed Mentoring

In addition to its regularly scheduled programs, volunteer efforts, and meetings, the YLS will sponsor a "speed mentoring" program this year. The program is modeled on speed dating and is designed to connect new lawyers with more seasoned attorneys who can provide both career guidance and more general mentoring. Like speed dating, each young lawyer will have two-to-three minutes with each mentor to ask questions and determine whether there is a "fit." Following the "speed" aspect, all the participants sit down to dinner together and talk informally. The connection of a mentor with a mentee occurs organically—no formal matches are made; if people connect, they remain in contact.

The speed-mentoring event is scheduled for November 20 and is co-sponsored by the University of Alaska Pre-Law Society (there are no law schools in Alaska). Elizabeth created the program to provide opportunities for Alaska's young lawyers to receive guidance and to give more seasoned attorneys a way to contribute to the growth of the next generation of lawyers.

Attorney of the Day

Also new on the calendar this year, the YLS is implementing an "Attorney of the Day" program to work with the local battered women's shelter. Elizabeth teamed up with Krista Scully, Pro Bono Director of the Alaska Bar Association, to create this program. They were inspired by the ABA's *Voices Against Violence*, a campaign to raise awareness about domestic violence, which launched toward the end of 2008. Elizabeth and Krista created "Awareness Kits" providing much-needed legal resources for victims of domestic violence. They distributed more than seventy-five of these kits at their launch event, which featured several speakers. In addition to Elizabeth, the speakers were Walter Carpenetti, Chief Judge of the Alaska Supreme Court; Sidney Billingslea, President of the Alaska Bar Association Board of Governors; and Sean Parnell, Governor of Alaska. Following the event, Elizabeth and Krista mailed kits to remote Alaskan villages and schools—areas whose residents have very limited options for seeking help outside their communities. The kits contained the ABA's *Voices Against Violence* DVD, the Alaska Women's Legal Rights Handbook, contact information for providers of pro bono legal services throughout Alaska, and other information about domestic violence.

The YLS received the ABA's Award of Achievement for its division size for this outreach and information. Elizabeth, inspired by the success of the outreach, wanted to keep the momentum going and build on it, primarily by encouraging young attorneys to contribute pro bono hours to helping victims of domestic violence. Specifically, she wanted to create opportunities for new attorneys that would require only a short-term commitment up front, so young lawyers would not feel overwhelmed. She contacted Alaska Legal Services and brainstormed with the attorneys there to come up with a program that could accomplish these goals.

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Teaming with Alaska Legal Services

Together, Elizabeth and Krista came up with this plan: Each month, Alaska Legal Services will provide an “Attorney of the Day” who will meet with up to five victims of domestic violence in need of legal help. The applicants for help will be pre-screened to ensure that an Attorney of the Day is qualified to provide the initial information they need. The Attorney of the Day is loaned to Legal Services for a day, during which he or she meets with the pre-screened applicants and gathers information, such as the factual background of the victim’s situation and the legal posture, if any, of the case. After the Attorney of the Day gathers the necessary information, he or she provides “brief service” to the applicant. Brief service may include a one-time consultation, or the drafting of one or more legal documents the applicant needs to file. After this, the Attorney of the Day drafts a brief memorandum describing the factual background and what services, if any, were provided to the client. With this memorandum, the Attorney of the Day turns the case over to Legal Services, which provides ongoing assistance to the client.

The attorneys can continue handling these cases, however, if they determine after the brief service that they would like to continue to be involved. If an Attorney of the Day chooses to continue his or her involvement in a case, he or she is assigned a supervisor from Legal Services who guides the attorney through every aspect of representing the client. Elizabeth hopes that the experiences young lawyers have with their brief service commitment will spark their interest and give rise to a desire, for at least some of them, to represent a client for an entire case. Elizabeth is clear that Attorneys of the Day are not expected to take on cases for the long haul, but this option is available, should any of them so choose.

The program also aims to involve law clerks, at some point in the future. Because clerks cannot give legal advice, their role would be to gather information from clients and to provide pro bono research assistance to Legal Services for extensive briefing or larger discrete issues. Of course, Alaska’s judges will clear the clerks’ participation in the program for conflicts and ethical issues.

The program will begin next month. All brief services will occur at the offices of Alaska Legal Services, which generously offered to provide the space to the Attorneys of the Day for all of their work on the program. Elizabeth created the Attorney of the Day program as a special project to allow young lawyers in Alaska to contribute to their communities in the form of pro bono work without being required to take on the commitment of an entire case.

Looking Ahead

Looking ahead, Elizabeth is spearheading the drafting and revising of the Alaska Bar Association Disaster Legal Services Plan and will, of course, seek the assistance of the New Lawyers Section of the Alaska Bar Association and the Young Lawyers Section of the Anchorage Bar Association. She also plans to implement another dedicated project for 2011—*Serving Our Seniors*—which she envisions will provide legal services to senior citizens in much the same way the Attorney of the Day program will provide services to victims of domestic violence.

Along with Elizabeth, the YLS Board consists of Leslie Need, Vice-President; Meghan Kelly, Secretary; and Leila Kimbrell, Treasurer. Leslie is Elizabeth’s right-hand person. She organizes all the social events and is President-Elect for 2011. Leila was awarded the YLS Distinguished Service Award in 2010 because of her continuing commitment and contributions to the section over the years. In addition to overseeing the YLS’s budget, she organizes the section’s annual clothing drive.

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