

## Justin Heather Receives 2009 National Outstanding Young Lawyer Award

By M. Vittoria "Giugi" Carminati

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

Heather, a litigation associate with the Chicago office of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP, defies stereotypes and goes above and beyond his extremely demanding practice to improve the lives of others and the bar.

### **Pro bono dedication**

Heather has logged more than 4,000 pro bono hours since he began practicing law eight years ago. He currently represents a client on death row, in a case referred by the ABA Death Penalty Project, at the Mississippi State Penitentiary in federal habeas corpus proceedings. He also serves as counsel to an inmate in Section 1983 litigation against prison officials arising out of an incident that caused traumatic injury to the inmate.

Heather, along with David Wolfe and Scott Henry, began a pilot program in 2009 for low-income senior citizens in Chicago that the ABA YLD will implement on a national basis during the 2010–2011 bar year. Through that program, "Serving Our Seniors," volunteer attorneys provide basic legal help to seniors by drafting wills and advanced healthcare directives.

### **Bar contributions**

In addition to his pro bono work, Heather serves as a vice-chair for the Chicago Bar Association's Young Lawyers Section and serves on the board of the *CBA Record* and the Young Professionals Board of the Chicago Bar Foundation and the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago. He also is a council member of the Illinois State Bar Association Young Lawyers Division.

Among his achievements, Heather has published legal articles and received several awards for his legal writing. He is an assistant editor for ABA YLD's *The Affiliate* and works as the editor of a book on behalf of the ABA Section of Litigation that is 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, Heather serves as a mentor to law students and an informal mentor and confidant for junior lawyers at Skadden.

### **Recognition**

Heather'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 and was the 2007 recipient of The Maurice Weigle Exceptional Young Lawyer Award presented by the Chicago Bar Association and the Chicago Bar Foundation. He also has received pro bono awards from his law firm.

Heather was humbled and made proud by 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," he said. "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.

The ABA YLD National Outstanding Young Lawyer Award recognizes an ABA young lawyer in good standing who exhibits: professional excellence; service to the profession and the bar; service to the community; and/or a reputation for or the advancement of legal ethics and professional responsibility. The deadline is August 31 of each year. For more information, visit [www.abanet.org/yld/noyla](http://www.abanet.org/yld/noyla).

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