

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE AUGUST & SEPTEMBER, 2009

“All for one and one for all.”

Joel H. Brown, Chief Judge, Eleventh Judicial Circuit Court of Florida, July 23, 2009.

Quoting the motto of the Three Musketeers, Chief Judge Brown called for unified constructive action from the bench, clerk, and bar after he was formally sworn in by Florida Supreme Court Chief Justice Peggy Quince in Courtroom 6-1 of the Dade County Courthouse. The old courtroom, restored to its original splendor through the combined efforts of the DCBA, the Eleventh Judicial Circuit Court, the Office of the Clerk, and Miami-Dade County, among others, served as the perfect venue and a fitting physical metaphor to the message delivered by our new Chief Judge.

The ceremony highlighted the best of what we are capable of achieving when we work together. In this regard, one of the greatest collective achievements of the bar, bench and local government is our very own Legal Aid Society. Let me relate some facts you may find of interest.

The DCBA Legal Aid Society (LAS) was established in 1939 with a single attorney. Today, Legal Aid Society has a staff of 42 specializing in family law and family stabilization services, domestic violence, advocacy for teens and guardianship matters for indigent persons residing in Miami-Dade County. There are five departments including Put Something Back (PSB), its pro bono department, which recruits and trains private attorneys to provide free legal services in all areas of civil law including cases not covered by LAS.

The Legal Aid Society Family Department has nine staff attorneys that serve over 5000 clients per year by direct representation in divorce, custody, paternity, domestic violence, adoption, visitation, child support and alimony cases. There is also a Guardianship Division with over 500 open cases.

The Legal Aid Society Domestic Violence Department provides advocacy for victims of domestic violence, with five outreach offices located throughout Miami-Dade County. Over 1200 clients annually obtain legal protection through this department.

The Housing/Benefits Department provides assistance to clients with housing, benefits, social security and employment discrimination problems. This unit defended two high profile class action suits on behalf of residents of local trailer parks and served over 700 persons last year.

The Transitioning Youth Project provides legal advocacy for foster teens ages 16 to 23 stabilizing their lives and assisting them in receiving support they are entitled to under law. This division helps over 100 teens each year. In addition to the above, we have several other projects with community partners.

PSB (Put Something Back) is a joint project of the DCBA, the 11th Judicial Circuit Court, attorneys, and over 200 law firm participants. PSB recruits, trains and refers lawyers to indigent persons in Miami-Dade County. In 1991, PSB began with one attorney and a paralegal. Today it has two full-time attorneys and three support staff and a dozen law student interns who work year-round.

PSB is Miami-Dade County's designated pro bono program and as such serves as a clearinghouse for all attorneys seeking to perform pro bono services. PSB has over 7000 Miami-Dade County attorneys and 200 law firm participants and continues to expand by increasing attorney and law firm participation and programs in innovative ways. Put Something Back pro bono lawyers provide free legal assistance to indigent individuals, families, children, elderly, disabled and qualifying non-profits. PSB provides FREE training, mentors, malpractice coverage, litigation support, research, technical assistance and consultations to volunteers. Activities are far-ranging and impact a wide spectrum of people living at or below poverty level. PSB has four geographically based intake sites making accessibility to services easier for those in need.

In short, the DCBA does a lot more than you probably know. Why don't you come to our next general membership meeting and learn more? Together, we really do make a positive impact in our communities.

Chief Judge Brown will be addressing our general membership at our luncheon meeting this month. Be sure to attend this historic event by making your reservation as soon as possible by calling the bar office at 305-371-2220 or visiting our website at www.dadecountybar.org. The luncheon will take place at the Hyatt Regency Downtown at 11:30 a.m. September 18, 2009.

We are looking forward to hearing Chief Judge Brown explain his vision for the Miami-Dade County Circuit Court and what role we will need play to help galvanize the desired fidelity among the bench, bar, and government embodied in the "All for one and one for all" motto he has espoused.

Please come to the luncheon. We need your participation at this important time.