

Giving Back In a Pro Bono Way

BY DEIRDRE SADLER-CREW

Do you know someone who goes above and beyond with *pro bono* work?

Does your law firm support you when taking on cases outside of your practice? If so, we want to shine a spotlight on you!

DSBA is looking to recognize those who participate, embrace and encourage *pro bono* work continually. I'm delighted to announce a new series of articles that highlights the committed and dedicated efforts of our members and law firms of the Delaware State Bar Association for their outstanding *pro bono* work.

While *pro bono* is a small phrase, it has a huge meaning to our community in need. The sacrifice of valuable time and obligation from attorneys can be a challenge, but the joy of being appreciated and honored can be rewarding to all involved. In creating a space for *pro bono* efforts to be recognized always and not only in October during National Pro Bono Week, this is a win-win moment.

The idea of this series came from attending the *Pro Bono Fair* hosted by Young Conaway in October. I briefly spoke with the firm's Vice-Chair, Michael R. Nestor, Esquire, and Director of DEI, Deborah R. Edwards, Esquire, about the event. Their event hosted several local community organizations, agencies and partners to come share their resources and time to give out information on the many *pro bono* opportunities available in Delaware. Attorneys from all firms were invited to mix and mingle to see how they could get involved. A challenging part of *pro bono* work can be, "How do I get started?" and events like this highlight that you can practice in any specialty but learn from organizations how to use your legal skills to take on and complete cases that need attorneys to donate their time.

To kick off our first article in the series, I reached out to Young Conaway with a few questions about their program. A special thank you to Deb, Mike, and their team for their promising *pro bono* program and long standing commitment to *pro bono* work!

Are you the next spotlight in the *Bar Journal*?

Help share your story and/or your colleagues stories to highlight the genuine commitment to *pro bono* services in our community. I can't wait to hear from you! Stay tuned!

First, can you share the takeaways from the *Pro Bono Fair* held in October and the firm's hopes for the future?

Young Conaway was thrilled to host our inaugural *Pro Bono Fair* on October 25th in celebration of the ABA's *Pro Bono Week*. Young Conaway's founders valued and executed on their interests in serving those in need and there remains a huge interest in *pro bono* work at Young Conaway. It was great to connect our attorneys to the non-profits that provide access to justice for Delawareans in need.

We intend to make the fair an annual event for the entire Delaware legal community. We invited our colleagues in Wilmington to attend the *pro bono* fair because as members of the legal profession all of us have a moral obligation to engage in *pro bono* work. We also know that *pro bono* representations provide attorneys with the opportunity to develop and build professional skills sets, and experience different areas of the law.

We send our gratitude to the non-profits that participated in the *Pro Bono Fair*: ACLU Delaware, Child, Inc., Office of the Child Advocate, Community Legal Aid Society, Delaware Volunteer Legal Services, and Legal Services Corporation of Delaware, and hope to see everyone at the Fair next year.

How does the firm encourage *pro bono* work?

We believe that it is critical to use our standing and resources to the benefit of the community. As a result, Young Conaway's Management Committee recently increased the firm's billable hour credit for *pro bono*, DEI, and community service from 50 hours to 100 hours annually. We encourage *pro bono* work by offering this credit, and fully supporting our attorneys' *pro bono* representations.

To encourage *pro bono* work, we have held several lunch programs featuring non-profit organizations to connect our attorneys and professionals to organizations in need of volunteers. The Firm also sponsors the Christopher W. White Access to Justice Awards Breakfast, to support and encourage *pro bono* work at Young Conaway and in the broader legal community.

In addition, we recognize one associate and one partner/counsel each year for their commitment to *pro bono* work. Mary



YOUNG CONAWAY

Dugan and Travis G. Maurer received awards this year for exemplary *pro bono* legal services to the community and the Bar. The awards, which come with a donation to a charity of the awardees choice, are another way in which we encourage *pro bono* work.

What type of *pro bono* cases does the firm usually handle?

The *pro bono* cases handled by our attorneys span the gamut of need. This includes child protection matters, immigration, protection against victim abuse, service for non-profit organizations, fundraising for local organizations that serve those in need, and community-based organizations throughout Delaware. The firm is also a member of the Law Firm Antiracism Alliance and the Alliance for Asian American Justice, which offer our attorneys many opportunities to do impactful justice work.

How are *pro bono* cases chosen for the firm?

Our attorneys are encouraged to engage in *pro bono* representations of their own choosing.

Does the firm have an annual goal for *pro bono* hours? Have you reached your goal?

We don't set annual goals because our lawyers are actively involved and interested in serving those in need. While we don't set specific goals, it is always our hope to surpass our *pro bono* hours year over year. This year the firm logged over 8500 *pro bono* hours.

How active is the firm's *pro bono* program?

The firm's *pro bono* program, led by Young Conaway's *Pro Bono* Committee, is very active, as evidenced by the number of collective hours spent on *pro bono* engagements. In addition, our attorneys have consistently donated in large numbers to the Combined Campaign for Justice to support the non-profits engaged in the important work of representing Delawareans in need.

The firm's commitment to, and activity regarding, *pro bono* work is evidenced by a recent matter Young Conaway has taken on involving an inmate on Alabama's death row. The representation, led by Partners Ed Harron and Elena Norman, includes over 25 attorneys and professionals at Young Conaway. From the start of our representation this February through September 30, firm attorneys and administrative professionals have expended over 2000 *pro bono* hours on this matter. Our handling of this matter is one example of the firm's commitment to access to justice for those most in need.

Has the firm won any *pro bono* awards?

- Office of the Child Advocate Pro Bono Honor Roll: Several Young Conaway Attorneys (2023)
- Christopher W. White Access to Justice Achievement Award: Michael R. Nestor, Esquire (2016)
- Christopher W. White Access to Justice Achievement Award: Natalie Wolf, Esquire (2015)
- Christopher W. White Access to Justice Leadership Award: Young Conaway (2007)

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Which attorney has the most *pro bono* hours?

Young Conaway views our service to the community and to those in need as a team effort — we typically serve each matter collaboratively to ensure that the impacted person/group receives the maximum support required from Young Conaway. As a result, our 8,000 hours of service represents the commitment of the Firm.

Any additional comments you would like to share regarding your *pro bono* program?

We will end where we started — with a tremendous sense of pride, Young Conaway continues to meet the objectives identified by its founders and exceeds year-over-year time dedicated

to those in need. As stated by Bruce Stargatt in 1999 when reflecting on the first 40 years of the firm.

... Young Conaway Stargatt & Taylor is not simply the cover name for a combination of business professionals whose aim in life is to maximize their individual profit. Rather we are citizen-lawyers joined together to practice our profession in an honorable way. From this has come our prosperity. While others who have made the pursuit of wealth their only goal have fallen by the wayside, by holding ourselves to a higher standard we have kept our self-respect, made it easy to respect each other, and gained the respect of those who have become our clients. This is a sturdy foundation on which to build ...

- Bruce M. Stargatt



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