

JOURNAL

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Fairfax Law Foundation *Pro Bono* Awards—2012



The FBA is pleased to announce the 2012 *Pro Bono* Awards given by the Northern Virginia *Pro Bono* Law Center. Local legal professionals were honored for their service at the Annual State of the Judiciary Membership Luncheon held on November 28, 2012. Arlene Beckerman, Director of *Pro Bono* Activities, stated, "It is through our generous volunteers that we are able to serve the neediest in our community and help to provide access to justice."

Pro Bono Paralegal of the Year—Tonia Mauck

Tonia Mauck has been a nurse paralegal for 28 years. She started her career in Richmond, where she stayed with a medical malpractice group for 15 years before moving to Northern Virginia in 1999. She worked for in-house counsel at The St. Paul Insurance Company, where she was Senior Medical Paralegal. After St. Paul, she worked for several years as Director of Risk Management for another insurance company. She began working with her current firm, Wilson Elser Moskowitz Edelman & Dicker, in August 2009.

While in Richmond, Tonia was heavily involved with the Virginia Breast Cancer Foundation, which was established in 1991. She served as its Secretary for a number of years. Throughout her career, she has periodically assisted attorneys with *pro bono* work at the various firms where she worked.

Beginning in October 2011, Tonia's firm, Wilson Elser, began to partner with the Springfield/Franconia Family Resource Center through the Northern Virginia *Pro Bono* Law Center's Neighborhood Outreach Program. The firm took on the responsibility of regularly sending attorneys and paralegals to the Resource Center on a monthly basis to meet with low-income clients and, at a minimum, provide legal advice and referral information, often taking clients on for full representation. Since the firm started the program last year, Tonia has participated in numerous clinics, has handled all of the paper work, and has worked on the *pro bono* cases the attorneys have taken on.

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Last year, on one of her visits to the site, Tonia noted that they had a food closet. She then took it upon herself to initiate a food drive, which was very successful. In the spring of 2012, the firm held another drive for food, diapers, formula, and personal hygiene items. Once again for Christmas, the firm held a food drive and in addition collected winter clothing including coats, hats, gloves, scarves, and socks for 16 children and two adults in the community.

Tonia's dedication not only uses her legal and organization skills in her career, but she also goes beyond her legal role that benefits clients in a direct and tangible way. Her dedication towards her volunteerism inspires others to join the effort.

Pro Bono Lawyer of the Year—Deborah Matthews

Deborah Matthews is a resident of Mt. Vernon and has established her office in Old Town Alexandria. Her practice is limited to estate planning, probate, and trust and estate administration—areas where she is frequently able to make a difference in the lives of her clients and their loved ones.

For several years, she served as Co-Chair of the FBA's Wills, Trusts, and Estates section. Deborah has lectured extensively before attorneys, judges, court staff and CPAs. She is licensed to practice law in Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. Upon moving to Fairfax County, Ms. Matthews opened her home to foster children. She served as a board member to United Christian Ministries (UCM) as well as President, Vice President, and as a founding member of the Friends of UCM. She is a Co-Chair of the Alexandria TRIAD, established by the Alexandria Sheriff to protect elderly citizens in the community, and is the Secretary of the Board of Directors of the Ivy Hill Cemetery Historical Preservation Society.

Most recently, when approached, Deborah jumped in to support the Northern Virginia *Pro Bono* Law Center's Wills on Wheels program, which provides life-planning documents to low-income and poverty seniors. The *pro bono* attorneys travel to partner sites throughout the county to meet with these clients. Deborah, without any hesitation, not only offered to completely rewrite the outdated training manual and update all of its forms, but she also recruited another trainer and presented an excellent CLE to prepare the volunteer lawyers to participate in the program, which is still in use today. She continued to serve as a mentor to participating lawyers, as well as becoming the go-to person for ongoing technical issues with the program. She has participated in providing hands-on services to low-income seniors, as well, and even drafted a retired judge to participate with her.

By going beyond the individual representation of clients, to teaching and writing valuable resource materials, Deborah has had a wide-ranging impact. By leveraging her knowledge to teach others to do this *pro bono* work, there is a ripple effect resulting in the program being able to serve many more clients than would otherwise be possible. Deborah has been enthusiastic and energetic in helping to make this program as good as it can be in serving those most in need.

Pro Bono Law Firm of the Year—Cole Miller PLLC

Cole Miller PLLC has actively participated in the Northern Virginia *Pro Bono* Law Center programs since its founding in 2009. After participating in the November 2010 Family Law *Pro Bono* Summit, Cole Miller became a member of Family Lawyers for Justice, has encouraged each of its lawyers to maintain at least one *pro bono* case, and has made the full resources of the firm available to represent those clients. Currently the firm is handling several active cases.

This commitment is particularly noteworthy because the matters undertaken by the firm are complex and contested family law cases, with each matter requiring a significant amount of time from the lawyer. The fact that the firm has consistently gone beyond the voluntary commitment of handling one active *pro bono* family law case at a time for the entire firm, to having each attorney in the firm handling a *pro bono* matter, is exceptional.

For example, Teresa Cole is representing a father referred in a contested visitation matter. The father has sole custody of his two children. He is also their sole source of support. The mother owes more than \$26,000 in child support arrearages. She was deported after several felony convictions. In very difficult circumstances, Ms. Cole is trying to develop a visitation proposal that will allow the children to spend time with their mother in a location other than her home country, where the children and the father will be better protected against kidnapping and other safety concerns. Additionally, Ms. Cole volunteers as a *pro bono* attorney for the Women's Center in Vienna.

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