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Wills for Heroes helps those who serve us every day

I was prompted to write this column by Chuhak & Tecson P.C.'s recent initiative to "give back." In celebration of its 25th anniversary this past year, the firm committed to complete 25 ways of giving back through a series of community service projects.

Firm employees joined together month after month, packing food at Greater Chicago Food Depository, shaking cans for Misericordia Candy Days and serving meals to the homeless, to name just a few activities.

Attorneys and staff enthusiastically showed up in force at each and every event.

I was particularly proud of our participation in the Wills for Heroes program.

Run by The Chicago Bar Association, Wills for Heroes provides complimentary basic estate planning services for first responders, such as police and fire personnel.

As a nine-year veteran of the Chicago Police Department, I was floored by the outpouring of support for this initiative.

Attorneys and staff from all areas of practice graciously sacrificed the better part of a Saturday at Chicago police headquarters.

Oftentimes, multiple attorneys counseled each client during this obviously successful program, ensuring that their and their families' estate planning needs were successfully met.

A tally of roughly 80 first responders and their significant others received legal services that day.

As attorneys, we often forget

that we acquired — through years of schooling and hard work — a unique skill set.

In future columns, I will focus on our individual roles in the community of lawyers. But for now, I want to talk about the role of a lawyer in the community.

Clients look to us to demystify things for them.

What is routine for us is often overwhelming and scary to others. Most non-lawyers freeze when it comes to signing a contract.

My wife and I recently rented a car on vacation and she quickly shifted the computer screen in my direction so I could review and approve the multipage, microscopic-font contract.

I dutifully pretended as if I had read it, analyzed it and approved it without changes. Only then was she willing to sign away her rights.

While my diligent review in that situation was suspect (we landed at 2 a.m. after a nearly two-hour flight delay and an hour drive ahead of us), the point remains the same: People want us to protect them from the unknown and assure them that things will be OK.

Wills for Heroes provides a concrete example of how we can, very simply, use our skills to help others.

First responders sacrifice much for our community, and on that Saturday, we provided them with much-needed peace of mind. You could clearly see that their concern for their loved ones was real and genuine.

After all, the lobby of police

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headquarters displays badges of hundreds of fallen officers — many of whom lost their lives serving alongside our clients from that Saturday.

“First responders sacrifice much for our community, and on that Saturday, we provided them with much-needed peace of mind.”

The unforeseeable for us is a job-related risk for them. We didn't secure their family fortunes from creditors or establish trust funds to preserve their wealth for future generations; money was not the focal point.

Primarily, I believed we helped relieve some of the stress that inevitably seeps into their psyches after each traffic stop made or burning building entered.

Wills for Heroes presents just one of many opportunities for us to help our community.

We can offer our legal acumen to outreach groups, community organizations and other worthy causes.

While these organizations need help in many ways, we as lawyers can lend our unique talents toward helping facilitate their missions.

As we all know, legal services can be expensive. But by volunteering our services to these organizations, we can offer them comfort, which they may not have access to or the means to achieve otherwise.

Witnessing firsthand the gratitude of the police officers and firefighters we served affected me. Seeing as they risk their lives as part of our community each and every day, it seemed the least we could do.

As a legal community, we are second to none.

We have the manpower and skills to help the many organizations that are helping others.

I encourage you to seek out opportunities like Wills for Heroes. I assure you that your time will be paid in full with gratitude.