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Pro bono initiative marks growth, cites stars

BY EMILY DONOVAN
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The Public Interest Law Initiative hosted its best-attended and highest-grossing annual awards event in its 39 years Wednesday, organization officials said.

The luncheon at the Palmer House Hilton had more than 500 attendees and raised \$195,000 for the organization. It was sponsored by 42 firms and 10 law schools, honored three attorneys and one organization and raised enough money during the event for two additional 2017 PILI interns.

"It seems fitting that this event would keep growing, given how much PILI's programs and reach have grown since our founding 39 years ago," said Michael G. Bergmann, PILI executive director.

PILI had 62 interns working for the organization this year, more than in years past, according to Bradley G. Lane, a partner at Brinks Gilson & Lione and PILI board president. The organization raised its interns' stipends for the first time in more than 10 years. The interns served 2,212 clients in five cities across Illinois.

PILI also coordinated 78 fellows, sponsored by 13 firms, who served 1,048 clients, and led the Pro Bono Initiative, aiding six judicial circuit pro bono committees and hosting four roundtables and four forums on how to encourage more attorneys to volunteer across the state.

The event honored the Pro Bono Network with the Pro Bono Initiative Award.

"We know that we are an out-of-the-box choice, as incredible organizations who came before us like United Airlines most likely did not start from around the kitchen table," said Donna Alberts Peel,

Pro Bono Network executive director.

The organization partners with legal aid agencies to staff volunteer opportunities and help launch new volunteer programs. It started five years ago as a small group mostly of stay-at-home moms on breaks from their legal careers wanted to volunteer while their kids were at school. It has since grown to more than 200 active attorney volunteers, including solo practitioners, part-time attorneys, small firm attorneys and retired attorneys.

Peel said her organization has just scratched the surface of its potential, as there are more than 11,000 inactive attorneys in the state and thousands more who are active and might volunteer more if they had the help of the Pro Bono Network coordinating opportunities for them.

PILI awarded Emily L. Seymore, an associate at Paul Hastings LLP who interned at PILI in 2009, its Distinguished Intern Alumni Award, recognizing her pro bono and public interest work.

Seymore said she still remembers her first time she accompanied a client to court wearing a suit and holding a folder of legal documents as she walked past a room of self-represented litigants who looked at her hoping she would help them next.

"I go back to that moment at the public aid agency as the point when PILI's mission of cultivating a lifelong commitment to public interest and pro bono was accomplished in me," she said.

Kristen E. Hudson, principal and general counsel at Chuhak & Tecson P.C. who was a PILI graduate fellow at Chicago Volunteer Legal Services in 2003, was awarded PILI's Distinguished Fellow Alumni Award.

She said she credits her PILI fellowship with making her the at-



Harold C. Hirshman

torney she is, and said that's why she volunteers, fundraises and serves on the board and brought two Loyola law students as her guests to the luncheon.

"It is my honor and my duty to pass on this tradition to the next generation of lawyers," she said.

PILI also honored Harold C. Hirshman, a partner at Dentons U.S. LLP, with its Distinguished Public Service Award.

Hirshman defended student protesters in the 1960s, sued the Navy on behalf of two lesbians who were wrongfully discharged in the 1970s and sued the Chicago Transit Authority to allow Planned Parenthood to advertise in buses and trains in the 1980s.

He's also sued the FBI for providing a gun, a car and a driver to assist in the murder of a young drug runner, filed fair housing lawsuits against the Chicago Housing Authority and represented prisoners in civil rights actions.

In 2015, Hirshman completed *Rasho v. Walker*, a 10-year class-action lawsuit, along with Mayer Brown LLP, Equip for Equality and Uptown People's Law Center for better treatment of prisoners with mental illnesses, which provided \$50 million in funding for 1,100 residential treatment beds



Kristen E. Hudson

and Illinois' first psychiatric hospital for prisoners.

Hirshman said his love for justice and pursuit of it came from his firm and his Jewish faith. He reminded attendees that change takes time and said it is not our obligation to finish the work, but it is our obligation to carry the work forward.

"In addition to being inspired, I ask that you take action," Lane said as he asked attendees to consider donating, sponsoring a fellow or taking up pro bono cases.

PILI set a fundraising goal of \$12,000 between Giving Tuesday, the Tuesday after Thanksgiving, and the end of the luncheon. Organizers had raised several thousand dollars before the luncheon and asked attendees to text a number to donate throughout the event or leave a check in specially marked envelopes. By the end of the luncheon, PILI raised about \$16,000.

The \$195,000 raised at the luncheon, which includes the internship funding, may aid PILI's goal to add a new staff person in central Illinois.

PILI organizers said the next year's awards event would be an evening gala to celebrate the organization's 40th year.