

I am truly honored and humbled to receive the ABA's Pro Bono Publico Award. Although the award is ostensibly being given to me, I accept the award on behalf of everyone that has contributed to and supported the pro bono projects that I have been privileged to work on, particularly my wife.

My desire and willingness to assist those in need stems from and was influenced by my family. During World War II, my grandfather was stationed in Italy as a medical doctor in a bombardment squadron that lost over 1,500 men. The men assigned to this squadron were often young, inexperienced and scared. To help calm these young soldiers' fears, my grandfather made the decision to go on bombing runs with his squadron. My grandfather went on these extremely dangerous bombing runs because it was the right thing to do.

My great-grandfather was a business leader in North Carolina during the 20th Century. During his life, he provided free health care to thousands, purchased more than one hundred homes for returning World War II veterans and personally persuaded financial institutions not to force the state of North Carolina into bankruptcy during the great depression. All of these decisions came with great personal sacrifice and significant risk. My great-grandfather did these things because they were the right things to do.

Using these men as role models, I quickly came to the conclusion in law school that doing pro bono work was the right thing to do. Therefore, I spent significant time working in a legal clinic dedicated to assisting low income individuals. As law school graduation approached, I was torn between pursuing public interest work or becoming a private practice litigation attorney. Fortunately, I was given the opportunity to join Womble Carlyle, a firm that was recognized for offering meaningful pro bono work while maintaining a highly respected litigation practice. Eight years later, I do not regret the decision because I have had the opportunity to develop my litigation skills while also providing pro bono assistance to those in need.

The bulk of my pro bono work has focused on two groups, disaster victims and military veterans. Both of these groups face the sobering prospect of asking for assistance from a third party, usually the federal government. With respect to disaster victims, I have had the privilege to serve as the Coordinator of the Disaster Legal Services ("DLS") program. The DLS program relies on a team of attorneys to coordinate the delivery of pro bono legal assistance to disaster victims. My team's primary goal for over two years was to establish a partnership with Legal Services Corporation ("LSC"). We believed that establishing this partnership was the right thing to do since it would improve the delivery of legal assistance to disaster victims. However, only after a federal lawsuit was filed did the establishment of a partnership with LSC become a reality. The formation of this partnership has provided comprehensive legal assistance to disaster victims throughout the country.

With respect to veterans, a federal statute prevented attorneys from accepting more than a nominal fee to assist veterans in filing initial disability claims with the Department of Veterans Affairs ("VA"). While the original purpose of this statute was to protect veterans from unscrupulous attorneys, the effect of the statute has been to prevent veterans from hiring attorneys. Given this situation, most veterans rely on non-attorney third party organizations to represent them in complex legal proceedings. Because I believed that these veterans needed

legal assistance, I decided to step into the void and began working with other concerned attorneys to create a pro bono program that would provide attorneys with the training and opportunity needed to effectively assist veterans. We thought that the creation and implementation of this program was the right thing to do since it would result in the unmet legal needs of an underserved population being satisfied. However, for over three years, the third party organizations that we contacted decided not to participate in the program. In spite of these hurdles, this program became a reality in 2007 and more than 1,000 veterans have now received pro bono legal assistance.

As I have experienced, doing the right thing is not always easy. There are usually bumps in the road. However, if we commit to making pro bono a fundamental component of our professional lives, and we persevere through the tough periods, we will make a difference to those most in need of our help.