

YOUNG LAWYERS

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YOUNG LAWYERS: THE FUTURE OF THE WEST VIRGINIA STATE BAR

Since my time as the Chair of the Young Lawyers Section Executive Committee (YLS EC) is coming to an end, I wanted to take this opportunity to tout the accomplishments of our members over the past year. You see, almost from the moment that I became a member of the YLS EC, I have heard the stories of how past members “didn’t work” or simply used their position on the YLS EC as a “resume builder.” I find it funny how these stories are often told by former YLS EC members who relish in these antics while assuming that the current board members behave in the same unsavory fashion. As a result, the spotlight, more than ever, has been squarely focused on our Committee and what we contribute to the West Virginia

State Bar. This scrutiny has not altered our efforts. In fact, we have viewed it as an opportunity to highlight all of the work that the YLS EC has done and continues to do.

YLS EC members are the young lawyers who made the conscious decision to commit their time to the West Virginia State Bar and the various YLS EC projects. During my four years on the YLS EC, I have worked with tremendous lawyers, who take pride in their position on the YLS EC, who take seriously their responsibilities to our fellow young lawyers and the people of West Virginia and who have consistently exceeded my expectations. As I scan a list of our current and former members, I realize that these young lawyers, with their com-

mitment to public service and the service of our West Virginia State Bar, will inevitably be the next leaders of this great organization. They will be the next Board of Governors’ members who shape the policies of the West Virginia State Bar, and who ensure that our organization endures. I am proud to have served with each of them, and thank them for their unwavering commitment to the YLS EC and the West Virginia State Bar.

I am also pleased to report that, thanks to our members, the last year has been a year of hard work that has resulted in great accomplishments. I am proud of every project that the YLS EC has continued or completed, but I am most proud of the group’s extensive community outreach and

mentorship. For example:

Wills for Heroes: After the tragic events of Sept. 11, 2001, the Wills for Heroes Foundation was created as a means to provide pro bono estate planning services to firefighters, police officers, paramedics and other emergency first responders who risk their lives every day to keep us safe in our local communities. Since that time, the program has expanded to include more than 37 states and has assisted thousands of first responders.

Former YLS EC Chair Chris Gardill took the first steps to bring the Wills for Heroes program to West Virginia, and over the past few years the YLS EC has been working to ensure its success. Finally, with the persistence of current YLS EC member Matthew Harvey, the YLS EC is ready to launch the Wills for Heroes program. The Wills for Heroes program will benefit hundreds of first responders in the state who otherwise would not be able to afford these services. The anticipated launch of the program is this spring.

Christmas Collection: For the second year in a row, the YLS EC has “adopted” families in need during the Christmas holiday. This program, the brainchild of current YLS secretary Jasmine Morton is particularly special in that the YLS EC prides itself on giving a helping hand to those less fortunate. Each year, the YLS EC chooses two families to benefit from the Christmas Collection. The YLS EC then provides these families with clothing, toys and even food during the holiday season. In addition to YLS EC budget monies, the YLS EC members selflessly donate their own money to ensure that these families have a joyful Christmas.

District Donations: Like the Christmas Collection, the YLS EC also supports local charities through personal donations. Since before my time on the Committee, each quarter the YLS EC has chosen to support a charitable organization. Again, YLS EC members dig into their own pockets to offer the monetary support, which many of these non-profit organi-

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zations need. In the last year, I am happy to announce that the YLS EC challenged the Board of Governors members to also provide monetary donations. The reaction has been astounding; in many instances the donation amounts have doubled. Thank you to all who continue to support this project.

Student Mentoring: In the past year, the YLS EC has actively expanded its mentoring programs to include high school, college and law students. In conjunction with the West Virginia Department of

Education, the YLS EC is now a mentor contact for teachers who need assistance teaching civics and legal theories. YLS EC members and other young lawyers have volunteered time to assist in mock trials, public speaking and even legal writing. YLS EC member Kameron Miller has taken the lead in this effort by coordinating the West Virginia Law Adventure while YLS EC member Blaire Hudson heads up the YLS EC student mentoring program.

While this article mentions only a few of the YLS EC's members, the truth is that I am proud to have worked with each of these lawyers. I encourage you to contact the YLS EC member in your State Bar district, get to know them and seek them out should you need assistance. As lawyers, it is vital to give back to the communities in which we live and work, and we should provide a helping hand to those less fortunate. The members of the YLS EC exemplify these ideals and make me excited about the future of our organization.

I leave my post as the YLS EC Chair knowing that our Committee has made a difference in the lives of many West Virginians, has upheld the title of “lawyer” as one of honor and caring and has worked hard to prove that, despite a lingering undeserved reputation, the YLS EC continues to shine as the future of the West Virginia State Bar. With future leaders like our current YLS EC members, I have no doubt that the West Virginia State Bar will thrive. **WVL**