

# THE DAILY RECORD

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## NYSBA ANNUAL MEETING

# Empire State Counsel working overtime, for free

By **ELIZABETH STULL**  
Daily Record Reporter

NEW YORK CITY — In spite of darkening economic predictions and financial thunderclouds, many people — lawyers and non-lawyers alike — are setting aside time to help those less fortunate.

Dozens of lawyers have done just that by volunteering 50 hours or more over the course of the past year. The New York State Bar Association will honor them today with a special luncheon during its annual meeting, being held through Friday at Manhattan's Marriott Marquis Hotel.

Through a program that began in 2006, the NYSBA designates those *pro bono* attorneys as "Empire State Counsel," an honorific title that can be used as a credential.

They also receive a certificate, a ribbon and a lapel pin.

Among those being recognized are 48 lawyers from Rochester. In the past year each of them gave their time and talent to help low-income clients or non-profit, governmental or public service organizations that serve the interests of low-income clients.

"We had many more that would have qualified, but they had to be state bar association members," said Linda Kostin, *pro bono* coordinator for the Seventh Judicial District *Pro Bono* Action Now Program.

She estimated that a dozen attorneys who worked with Volunteer Legal Services Project of Monroe County Inc. performed 50 hours or more, and about half of those received the award.

Managing partners at some of the area's largest firms are predicting that the need for *pro bono* legal services will be much greater in 2009 as the impacts of the national financial crisis deepen. Demand for low-income services is rising, even as the state and federal governments are cutting their budgets.

As early as the fall of 2008, VLSP saw the number of clients using its consumer debt clinics increase dramatically.

"It's impossible to overemphasize the significance of the volunteers' contribution. Especially in the current economic conditions, a large portion of our community would not have access to legal services," Kostin said. "The needs of poor people escalate during these times, and these volunteers stepped up across a broad swath of practice areas."

While lawyers are not required to perform public service, new ethical guidelines that will become effective April 1 strongly encourage a minimum contribution of 20 hours. The state's recently revised ethical rules also state that in addition to providing *pro bono* service, lawyers also should contribute financially to organizations providing legal assistance to people of limited financial means. Rule EC 2-34 (formerly 2-25) also specifies what types of service qualify.

The NYSBA presents its President's *Pro Bono* Service Awards on Law Day, May 1, to individual attorneys and groups that perform outstanding *pro bono* service.



BRAD HAMILTON FOR THE NEW YORK STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

Rochester attorney Jennifer Weidner participates in the panel discussion "Bars and Boomers: Succession Planning and Ethical Considerations for Trusts and Estates Practitioners" during the New York State Bar Association's 132nd annual meeting, being held all week at the Marriott Marquis Hotel, Manhattan. About 5,000 attorneys are expected to attend. With more than 76,000-member association is the largest volunteer state bar association in the country.

The 2008 Empire State Counsel from Rochester (in alphabetical order) included Sheldon Boyce; Timothy Broshears; Michael Canfield, Luis Casillas; Jessica Chicalacos; Jason Clark; Margaret Clemens; Dwight Collin; David Cook; Michael Cooney; James D'Anza; Tara Eyer Daub; Penny Dentinger; Christopher Desiderio; Peter Durant; Meghan Fennelly; Jeannie Figer; John Garrett; Peter Glennon; William Lang; Steven B. Levitsky; Bryan Lewis; Bipul Mainali; Lindsay Maleson; Nicole Marro; Carol Maue; Daniel McAvoy; George McCormack; Jean McCreary; James P. McElheny; Patrice Morrison; Michael Mueller; Catherine Nearpass; Gregory Nearpass; John Nutter; Anita Pelletier; Terence Robinson; Kevin Saunders; Jon Schumacher; Rebecca Simone; Scott Simpson; Stacey Slater; Marc A. Spezzano; David Tennant; Christopher Thomas; Jason Torres; Daphne Vicek and Jeremy Wolk.

Opportunities for *pro bono* legal work in the Rochester area can be found through NYSBA's Web site at [www.nysba.org](http://www.nysba.org) or by contacting any local legal service provider directly.

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