

# Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 159, No. 25

## Program shows callers the 'right direction'

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Every month, Gail C. Anstett-Patrick spends a couple of hours on a Saturday morning answering phone calls from people who need legal assistance.

But even after doing that for a few years, the Elgin sole practitioner said she knows countless others need help.

"The different programs and agencies in Kane County still can't keep up with the need," she said. "So if we can deal with 20, 30, 40 or 50 phone calls on a given Saturday morning, it's just a good thing to do."

For the last five years, the Kane County Bar Association has run a program called "Ask A Lawyer Day" to provide free legal help to the public via phone.

On the second Saturday of each month, people can call (630) 762-1900 between 9 a.m. and noon and receive a free consultation with one of six attorneys answering phones that day.

"We manage at least 30 calls every Saturday," said Jan Wade, the bar association's executive director. "During an hour and a half (shift), each attorney is talking to about five people."

Through the program, callers receive help with legal questions about real estate matters, landlord and tenant disputes, criminal cases, estates and wills, divorces, child custody issues, collections, bankruptcy and traffic citations.

"It is just a gamut of inquiries that come in," Wade said. "The

members seem to enjoy participating. I don't seem to have any problems finding volunteers lined up to help out."

The only monthly call-in service of its kind in the state, the program launched in 2008 after the bar group participated in a similar Law Day program hosted annually by the Illinois State Bar Association.

"We thought, 'You know what? Let's just do this every Saturday this year,'" Wade said.

A year later, they scaled the program back to a monthly effort, at the suggestion of one of the program's volunteers — Robert J. Sandner, an associate at Foote, Meyers, Mielke & Flowers LLC in St. Charles.

"The number of people who need legal advice is overwhelming and to do it once a week, you would still have people in need," Sandner said. "The more resources that citizens have, the more comfortable they feel with the (court) system."

Anstett-Patrick began taking calls through the program more than five years ago and said it helps keep her legal mind fresh.

"It's kind of fun because we get such a variety of questions in all fields," she said. "It forces me to remember things from law school."

Volunteering for the effort provides more instant gratification than other pro bono work, Anstett-Patrick said.

"You spend 15 minutes on the phone with somebody, and they're thanking you profusely," she said. "It's rewarding to the people who call, and it's very



Jan Wade

rewarding to the people who do it. I would love to see other counties adopt a similar program."

The program's 70 volunteer attorneys not only receive calls from Kane County residents — they also get calls from people outside the state, Wade said.

"Sometimes people just need to ask a question to get them started," she said. "They don't even know where to begin. ... They can call up at no cost and ask a question and get some direction, get some guidance."

Westmont sole practitioner Jon E. Ehrenstrom, who joined the program in 2008, said he believes his legal guidance empowers people.

"It gets people stepping in the right direction," he said. "People are intimidated by lawyers anyway. If they can call and pick your brain, you can get them headed in the right direction."