

# *for the* **Greater Good**

## ***Pro Bono Awards Program to Recognize Attorneys Who Give Back to Those in Need***

by Sara Fitzpatrick Comito

Ask any member of the Lee County Bar Association why they wanted to go into law, and there's a good chance you'll get an answer like this: "I wanted to help people, to make a difference."

The annual Pro Bono Awards Program recognizes attorneys who take that commitment even further, providing legal services to those who need them but cannot afford them. Florida Rural Legal Services (FRLS) Pro Bono Coordinator, Ethel Wells, sees the program as a means to enhance awareness about the need for pro bono participation in our community. According to Wells, that need is greater than ever.

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The Pro Bono Award ceremony will begin at 11:45 a.m. on October 28 at the Royal Palm Yacht Club. Everyone is invited to attend the celebration, which includes an elegant gourmet lunch, networking and recognition of more than 45 attorneys for their pro bono work in 2010. Each award recipient will receive an appreciation gift for their generosity in accepting pro bono cases last year through the Pro Bono program at FRLS.

Wells said the economy doesn't discriminate, and everyone – including lawyers – is feeling the effects. So when an attorney steps up, despite his or her own uncertainty in these times, it really is something worth celebrating. And for those her agency serves, the help is



truly a godsend. Unfortunately, there's simply not enough help to go around. The demand for pro bono services is at an all time high, and more attorneys are greatly needed to meet the supply and demand.

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## ***Walk the Walk***

How can you get involved, or satisfy your pro bono service requirement? You may become an official pro bono service provider when you complete the questionnaire you get in the mail every year to determine the type of case you'd be willing to accept. You may also elect to choose the \$350 buyout option, rather than take on a pro bono case. This year more than 1,500 attorneys were contacted across Charlotte, DeSoto, Glades, Hendry and Lee Counties, yet less than 100 attorneys committed to pro bono service. Buyouts amounted to \$17,000.

Consider this entreaty from the website of the ONE Campaign ([onepromiseflorida.org](http://onepromiseflorida.org)): "Imagine the impact we could make if every attorney in the state of Florida helped one pro bono client."

This is a message FRLS' participating attorneys have already heard, and why Wells believes they deserve special recognition. But what are the barriers to the