

## PRESS RELEASE

Free legal time, valued at more than \$74,000.00 was given last year to clients in the 10<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit (Polk, Highlands, Hardee Counties) by local attorneys, who volunteered their services, *pro bono*, through Florida Rural Legal Services, Inc.

"I do *pro bono* work because it is the right thing to do, said Sam Crosby, Esq., of Miller, Crosby & Miller, P.A. "It is the right thing to do for the profession and legal system that provide me a good living. It is the right thing to do to assist those who have not had the blessings I have had. It is the right thing to do for our community. I have been poor with no one to turn to in a crisis and I am not going back to that condition, but I can help some of those who face such challenges."

*Pro bono* assistance is provided to those individuals with income at and below 125% of poverty guidelines. Clients who have civil legal needs are screened by Dorene Yates, Pro Bono Coordinator, and cases are placed with private attorneys who volunteer in their specific area of law practice. "When I call an indigent client and tell them that an attorney will help them for free, they are incredulous, grateful, and often cry with relief," Yates says.

One example is of a 70 year old lady, living solely on her meager Social Security income of \$700 per month who had her income illegally garnished by a debt collector; she came to Florida Rural Legal Services for assistance. Yates sent out an e-mail plea and within one hour received contact from Attorney James Lobo, Jr. who volunteered to assist *pro bono*. Within a few weeks an Order Dissolving the Writ of Garnishment was obtained.

Another case involved a widow, still grieving over the death of her life-partner who died from a long illness, who received *pro bono* assistance with the overwhelming details of probate and creditor harassment from Attorney Abigail O'Connor of Holland and Knight, P.A.

A father, who had been caring for his child after his wife's death, needed to establish paternity in order to obtain medical attention for his son and enroll the child in school, due to an error on the child's birth certificate. Solo practitioner, Attorney Ira Serebrin, was able to establish paternity through DNA testing and correct the birth certificate to reflect the father's name.

Other attorneys, such as Keith Merritt, Eva Donohue and William Rinaldo, have conducted public seminars explaining bankruptcy and answering questions from attendees. Various bar associations, such as the Virgil Hawkins Bar Association, staff Ask-a-Lawyer and Family Law clinics where those with low income can receive free counsel and advice.

When joining the Florida Bar, attorneys take an oath to "never reject the cause of the defenseless or oppressed," and it is suggested that they donate 20 hours of free legal service annually. It is through the unselfish efforts and voluntary participation of local attorneys that equal access to justice is provided to the indigent of our community.