

COMMENTARY

Fire victims – two- and four-legged – need help

Although the Rodeo-Chediski fires have been contained for quite some time, their victims continue to suffer. So many of our neighbors lost their homes, jobs, cars and family pets. Fortunately, Maricopa County lawyers can and are helping the victims get back on their feet by providing volunteer legal services or contributing to the Arizona Humane Society's Wildfire Relief Fund.

The State Bar of Arizona graciously agreed to host and answer a toll-free telephone number set up for the victims of the fires. In accordance with the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division's agreement with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, lawyers are providing pro bono legal services to the victims. Questions have ranged from "Do I have insurance to cover my losses?" to "I lost my job and can't pay my rent. Is there anything I can do?" to "My will was in my home and was destroyed by the fire. Can you help me draft a new one?" The volunteer attorneys can answer most of the questions over the telephone in only a few minutes. Pursuant to the ABA YLD's agreement with FEMA, the volunteers cannot handle a fee-generating case, and those matters are referred to a local lawyer referral service.

If you are interested in volunteering to help the victims, please contact Mira



Susan
WISSINK
MCBA / YLD
PRESIDENT

Radovich at the State Bar at mira.radovich@staff.azbar.org. We are looking for volunteers in the areas of insurance, wills, landlord/tenant, employment, business and creditor/debtor, and environmental and natural resources, although we welcome all volunteers. When a victim calls the toll-free number, the State Bar will collect some information and then contact a volunteer attorney with experience in the area of law needed. The volunteer attorney then calls the victim and works directly with the victim to assist with his or her legal needs.

Thanks to the State Bar's Cynthia Zwick, Matt Silverman and Mira Radovich for agreeing to host the toll-free number, organizing the volunteers and providing this invaluable service to those hurt by the Rodeo-Chediski fires.

Another way to help the victims of the disaster is to donate to the Arizona Humane Society's Wildfire Relief Fund. During July, Jamie Burgess of Fennemore Craig coordinated a drive to help raise funds to assist the pets that were left behind or displaced because of the fires. Although several thousand dollars were raised in June and July, the humane society still needs more to help with continued veterinary needs and future emergency rescue and relief efforts, and to help fund veterinary care for animals in crisis, such as animals evacuated from fires, floods or other natural disasters and victims of animal cruelty. If you would like to contribute, please make your check payable to the Arizona Humane Society Wildfire Relief Fund and mail it to the Arizona Humane Society, 1521 W. Dobbins Road, Phoenix, 85041.

The MCBA YLD would like to recognize its volunteer of the month for August, Carolyn Martin of Jennings, Strouss & Salmon, for editing the Statute of Limitations Guide. The guide has been a tremendous success and we couldn't have done it without all of the Carolyn's hard work. ■

Help foundation give money away

By Gregory R. Knight
MCBF President

We have money to give away, but we need your help.

No, this isn't a sweepstakes or government program. We are the Maricopa County Bar Foundation, a charitable organization affiliated with the Maricopa County Bar Association. Part of our funding comes from your annual dues. We also host an annual golf tournament, which will be combined this year with the Volunteer Lawyers Program.

The MCBF is looking for non-profit organizations that need funds. Applicants should provide legal services for underprivileged individuals and promote legal education. The exact requirements and application forms are available from Brenda Thomson, executive director of the MCBF and the MCBA.

Here are some examples of the types of organizations that the MCBF has supported in the past:

The Never Again Foundation

The Never Again Foundation actively protects the civil rights of physical- and sexual-abuse victims. It pursues civil remedies against abusers and raises the public's awareness of civil remedies available to abuse victims. Although the money judgments it obtains are rarely satisfied, they are symbolic victories that provide dignity and emotional closure to victims of abuse.

Recently the foundation won a historic civil judgment of \$1.25 million against a man who beat his wife almost to death. The convicted abuser agreed to a divorce and relinquished his claim to more than \$1 million in marital property in exchange for full settlement of the civil judgment against him.

The foundation is currently representing a woman shot in the face by her husband after only one week of marriage; a 6-year-old boy who had been sexually abused by his stepfather; a 13-year-old mentally handicapped girl impregnated by her father; two teenage girls molested by their uncle; and several women who suffered domestic violence at the hands of those purporting to love them.

The foundation also recently raised public awareness to a legal loophole that convicted sex abusers are using to avoid civil accountability to their victims. According to A.R.S. §13-807, *criminally convicted* defendants may not deny their actions in subsequent civil suits brought by their victims. However, because the statute of limitations for civil claims is only two years, many convicted sex offenders are avoiding civil accountability to their victims. Many sex crime victims do not file a civil claim within two years due to trauma, guilt, ongoing

criminal proceedings and other reasons.

Advocates for the Disabled

The MCBF also supports Advocates for the Disabled which, among other things, helps underprivileged people navigate the complexities of obtaining Social Security and disability benefits.

It recently helped a disabled 56-year-old single woman who was living on the street. She was unable to work, had no income and no place to live, and suffered from severe asthma and depression. Advocates for the Disabled helped her get medical assistance, disability payments and subsidized housing, and even acted as the woman's payee to manage her funds. Now the woman is settled in an apartment, has medical help and is able to manage her own affairs in a dignified way.

Advocates for the Disabled also recently assisted a 42-year-old single man who was living in his truck. He was diabetic and disabled and had spent his last dollar on medicine. He literally had nothing to eat. The organization immediately helped him get food and other resources for the homeless. It also helped him to fill out paperwork for disability, medical help and cash assistance, and assisted him with getting an apartment.

The Never Again Foundation, Advocates for the Disabled and other similar groups are helping people, one at a time, to improve their lives through the law. We, as lawyers, have the ability to restore hope where there is now hopelessness and to bring mercy into people's lives in situations where we are uniquely qualified to do so. The alternative is for us to pass by on the other side of the street and do nothing. ■

THOSE WHO NEED LEGAL HELP AS

a result of the Rodeo-Chediski fires may call, toll-free, 1-866-255-4495 and leave their contact information on the State Bar's hotline. A qualified attorney will return their call within 48 hours. The volunteer attorneys are able to assist in areas including insurance claims, real estate, wills and probate issues, employment and labor, business and creditor and debtor. Because of the anticipated volume of calls, the volunteer attorneys will only be able to provide basic services such as filling out forms and free consultation. ■

Winning thoughts

Kathleen Mullin, a paralegal at Quarles & Brady Streich Lang, won the MCBA's second gourmet food basket for contributing her thoughts about how



the MCBA can best communicate with its members. The MCBA distributed surveys to members at seminars, meetings and other events. Mullin's name was selected at random from among those who returned surveys to the MCBA after early June. ■



303 E. Palm Lane
Phoenix, AZ 85004
602-257-4200 • 602 257-0522 (fax)
www.maricopabar.org

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Editorial content

Managing editor: Patricia A. Sallen

602-956-4546
602-956-4419 (fax)
maricopalawyer@mcbabar.org

Advertising

Display advertising: Kirra Philpott

480-515-5719
480-515-5446 (fax)
maricopalawyerdisplayadvertising@msn.com
Classified advertisements: MCBA
602-257-4200
602-257-0522 (fax)

Makeup/Production

Marty Marsh, Marlan Publishing Group
1125 W. Baseline Rd., #2-153, Mesa, AZ 85210
480-777-8552 • 480-820-1496 (fax)
marty@marlanpub.com