The Practice

LAW SCHOOLS OPEN DOORS TO STUDENTS DISPLACED BY HURRICANE KATRINA

Connecticut attorneys—from solo practitioners to those in large firms—are stepping up to help victims in Hurricane Katrina-devastated areas.

Members of the Connecticut Bar Association's Young Lawyers Section are coordinating a supply drive to help in the long-term relief and recovery. McCarter & English attorney Seth Wilson, co-chair of the section's diversity committee, came up with the idea for the collection, YLS Public Service/Pro Bono Vice Director Michael D. Fox said.

There are many efforts in which monetary donations are being collected, but the YLS is focusing on supplies that will be needed months from now, such as mosquito netting and water purification tablets, Fox noted. I was so surprised with the quick response, he said.

Donations have been pouring in from across the state—from large firms, such as Tyler Cooper & Alcorn, to Fox's firm of Logan & Mencuccini, to New Hartford solo practitioner Thomas Santoro who went around his neighborhood in the evenings collecting items, Fox said. We're looking at a really good turn-out, he said, adding the effort could last up to three months.

The Connecticut Bar Association and the Connecticut Bar Foundation are also joining a coordinated effort to solicit contributions for ongoing relief efforts, CBA President Louis Pepe said.

In addition, Tyler Cooper is matching employee donations—dollar for dollar— to the American Red Cross, firm executive director Harold Cort said. Hartford-based Shipman & Goodwin's efforts, meanwhile, are two-fold. It is matching lawyer and staff contributions to eligible relief organizations up to $50,000, according to its managing partner, Scott Murphy. And for those employees who want to get involved in a hands-on way, the firm is offering them up to two weeks of paid leave to travel to the
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Gulf Coast area to assist in relief efforts, said Murphy. As of press time, he did not know how many employees would take the firm up on the latter offer. To assist in local relief efforts, Shipman employees are being given up to two days leave.

As the chairwoman of the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division's disaster legal services team, Rani Newman Mathura, an associate in Cummings & Lockwood's Greenwich office, expects to be in great demand. The Young Lawyer Division's pro bono arm is contracted by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and will provide legal services to the hurricane victims in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. Calls to the group's toll-free hotlines is increasing, Mathura said, as victims begin to assess their future plans. A majority of the problems being handled now relate to death certificate, guardianship and landlord-tenant issues, said Mathura, who expects the hotlines to be up for a minimum of six months.

Area law schools also have come to the aid of law schools students in the ravaged area. Second- and third-year law students from Tulane University Law School and Loyola University New Orleans will be able to attend classes locally this semester on a visiting basis. The assistance comes free of tuition, as long as a student has paid tuition to their respective school in Louisiana.

It sounded like the right thing to do, said Associate Dean Eric Gouvin of Western New England College School of Law. The Springfield-based law school has accepted two students from Tulane University.

The University of Connecticut School of Law is able to take in up to 20 students on a transient or visiting basis for the fall semester. There was a lot of interest, but then people began to pursue lots of different options, Associate Dean Ellen Blake Rutt said. The greatest wave of continuing interest is coming from first-year students from Tulane. UConn Law has agreed to take first-year students because of the schools' similar curricula, Rutt said. Three students had arrived by Sept. 6, when classes began.

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