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## Pro Bono Week makes case for service

By Sarah Mansur  
Law Bulletin staff writer

The legal profession sometimes carries a negative connotation, said Michael G. Bergmann. He thinks Pro Bono Week can help change that.

"I think it elevates us as a profession to do [pro bono work]," said Bergmann, executive director of the Public Interest Law Initiative, which has been involved in Pro Bono Week since the event's start. "And we don't always have the best reputation as a profession."

Pro Bono Week, an annual weeklong celebration honoring the work of pro bono lawyers and highlighting pro bono opportunities, was founded by The Chicago Bar Association and The Chicago Bar Foundation 13 years ago. The celebration gained national recognition through the American Bar Association in 2009.

Pro Bono Week 2017 starts Monday. The year's theme is For the Sake of the Community.

Bergmann said the idea behind Pro Bono Week is twofold.

"There is so much and has been so much great pro bono work already being done ... They never get recognized or told how much it's appreciated," he said. "One part of it was to truly celebrate the great stuff that was going on and to thank those people for their contributions. But I think the other idea was to help those who don't do as much or any pro bono, to see and hear what their colleagues are doing and the impact that it's having in hopes that it will encourage them to also do pro bono."

The focus this year is how pro bono work can contribute to local economic development and how lawyers can use their skills to strengthen communities, said Angela Inzano, bar foundation program manager.

"On Monday, we are having a Continuing Legal Education program on that exact topic," Inzano said. Monday's program is called Community Development Through Pro Bono.

She said lawyers will learn ways to help small business owners or entrepreneurs navigate through the legal issues that they might face when launching a business or protecting a creative work.

Inzano said there will be two other new programs in Chicago next week. How Pro Bono Contributes to a Successful Career is the topic of one and the other is Effective Representation of Individuals With Mental Health Conditions.

The Pro Bono and Community Service Fair also takes place during the week and has become a cornerstone of the annual celebration, Bergmann said.

The fair will be held Oct. 26 from 5 to 7 p.m. at Kirkland & Ellis' law offices, 300 N. LaSalle Drive.

The fair brings representatives from more than 40 of Chicago's legal aid, pro bono, community service and mentoring organizations together.

"I think that's a terrific opportunity to bring the community together both in terms of the people looking to do pro bono as well as the people who have the pro bono opportunities — to get them together in one place and hopefully make a really great connection around the potential for future pro bono," Bergmann said.

The 24th annual fair is presented by the CBA Young Lawyers Section, and co-sponsored by the bar foundation and Kirkland & Ellis LLP.

Trisha M. Rich, co-chair of this year's Pro Bono Week, said the events and programs help lawyers to actively think about ways to improve their communities.

"We have the opportunity to provide access to justice to so many people who otherwise wouldn't receive that. So Pro Bono Week is a great opportunity to highlight the ways that lawyers can get involved in all kinds of different activities," said Rich, an associate with Holland & Knight LLP.

"The point is that there is so much pro bono work that needs to be done, any lawyer can find an opportunity that speaks to them and that's what I love about Pro Bono Week."

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