



## Lawyers Working in the Community

By Jodi Wyman

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Lawyer jokes usually portray lawyers in a negative light. Hopefully, the public understands that unethical and dishonest lawyers are actually very rare. The vast majority of lawyers not only do an excellent job, but also make an important contribution to their communities.

The Manitoba Bar Association conducted a survey a few years ago. It asked lawyers to describe their volunteer and community activities of the previous year.

The results showed that the average Manitoba lawyer volunteers with three different community organizations. Lawyers spent an average of 99 hours a year doing volunteer work for charitable and not for profit organizations.

In Brandon alone, lawyers have been President or Chair of the Board of Directors for the Canadian Cancer Society, Multiple Sclerosis Society, CNIB, Chamber of Commerce, Big Brothers & Sisters, Brandon Kiwanis Club, YMCA,

YWCA, Brandon Kinsmen Club, Brandon University Board of Governors and Alumni Association, and Assiniboine Community College. Local lawyers have been involved with Brandon General Hospital Foundation, Crimestoppers, Elizabeth Fry Society, Westman Dreams for Kids, United Way, Kinsmen, John Howard Society, Brandon Area Community Foundation, The Women's Centre, Brandon Rotary Club, to name a few.

Many lawyers also are involved in coaching hockey, soccer, or basketball. They volunteer countless hours at their children's school or their church, join community theatre and numerous fundraisers.

Both Brandon University and Assiniboine Community College have had lawyers as educators. The Women's Centre has been able to offer regular free legal clinics as a result of local lawyers volunteering their time.

Brandon and area lawyers are also active in their professional

organizations, specifically the Law Society of Manitoba, the Canadian and Manitoba Bar Associations, and locally the Western Manitoba Bar Association. Lawyers donated an average of 52 hours per year to these types of organizations.

Those jokes about selfish and greedy lawyers do not reflect the actual professionals who take calls at home from worried strangers. They do not mention lawyers who go to the jail or hospital on a Sunday morning to help someone, often with no guarantee of being paid. Many people laugh at lawyer jokes but on an individual basis are very loyal to their personal lawyer and would not group their own lawyer in with the popular conception.

The Manitoba Bar Association survey also had interesting results as to the amount of "non-paid" legal work done each year. Manitoba lawyers spend many hours doing free, reduced fee, or Legal Aid work for people unable to pay for legal services. The average time per year spent by each

lawyer doing pro bono work was 48 hours. The average number of hours of work done at a reduced hourly rate or reduced fee was 58. The average number of hours spent on Legal Aid work was 211.

The survey also showed that lawyers are involved in political activities as well including canvassing, telephoning and assisting with election activities. Lawyers run for election to City council, school boards or their local rural municipalities. The average practising lawyer in Manitoba donates approximately five hours per week for non paid work, including community work as well as reduced fee work.

Lawyers contribute countless hours to their clients and their communities. They are valuable members of many charitable and not for profit organizations. Hopefully this will someday be reflected in the content of lawyer jokes.