

On May 16 the Hon. Martha Wentworth who is the Judge of the Indiana Tax Court and also serves as Chair of the statewide Pro Bono Commission joined Judge Moore, a group of local leaders and volunteers in recognizing Patrons and Supporters of the Clark Legal Self Help Center. The luncheon was attended by approximately 75 guests and was held at Cricket's Café in Sellersburg. It was co-sponsored by Your Community Bank and New Washington State Bank.

The Self Help Center is an all-volunteer service coordinated and supported by a Board of Planners, local elected leaders, private citizens, area banks and foundations. Jill Oca serves as chairperson of the Board of Planners.

The Self Help Center officially began working in May 2010 when Chief Justice Randall Shepard of the Indiana Supreme Court accepted an invitation from Judge Dan Moore of Circuit Court No. 1 to officially open the Center. Moore was a guiding force in developing the concept and idea from the start and he was joined by a large welcoming group of other local guests, to launch the effort and welcome the Chief Justice to Clark County. The Chief spoke at length applauding the goal of the Clark Center to always try to aid people just served with "court papers" that do not have significant means to access lawyers in their lives.

Chairperson Oca's comments at the recent luncheon again pointed out that the Center is not a substitute for legal advice and that its volunteers often refer people to area attorneys, and legal volunteer organizations, who have provided their office name and location to accept referrals.

The Self Help Center is located in the courthouse and was organized as an information delivery service. The make-up of the Board of Planners includes attorneys, pastors, business people and Jill Oca, C.P.A. who serves as Chairperson. Since 2010, according to Moore, the Center's outreach and service have "grown exponentially" in helping to provide a calm helping hand and a guidance-and-information service to those who have legal crisis facing them, but cannot afford traditional legal fees due to indigent status.

“Our local attorneys, who work at the desk on Tuesdays and Thursdays, are also aided by an agreement reached with the University of Louisville law school for student interns. These students see first-hand that the legal system impacts human beings in many different ways and THAT cannot be taught in a classroom from a textbook” Moore stated.

Oca and Moore both stated that local Attorney Mark Robinson who manages Indiana Legal services Inc (ILS). Offices locally and his colleague attorney Marianne Conrad, have been of invaluable help since the Center started. Norman Metzger, Executive Director of ILS in Indianapolis has worked with Mark and Marianne, through the local office, to provide pamphlets and management support services to aid the Self Help Center’s operations since its beginning. “This is a 100 % team effort” Moore always says ‘and it could never work without the great team we have across-the spectrum from ILS, private citizens and reaching to CEOs” he said.

Oca emceed the 2013 event and Judge Wentworth was keynote speaker. This jurist has a background in tax law and was in private practice before being appointed to the bench by Governor Daniels. She accepted the statewide Pro Bono Commission Chair appointment and gave remarks about outreach and caring to the local group.

Her message focused on the need to always be building a community-wide base of stakeholders, including bank sponsors, area businesses and foundations. She pointed out here will “always be a need” to help the poor who sometimes do not have the money to hire lawyers.

Judge Wentworth had high praise and complements for the Clark Center for setting an example statewide on how to build a community service group to help the less fortunate navigate through the often challenging pathways of the court system. She complemented Judge Moore for his vision in developing the concept of a service center in the courthouse and then working with others to make it happen.

After the luncheon Moore took Judge Wentworth to the courthouse to see the Center in operation. Bar President Tom Thomas was working with citizens at the desk. “I think the Judge was very impressed” Moore stated.

Local attorney Bob Bottorff was a presenter at the luncheon, before Judge Wentworth spoke. He is a Center volunteer and a Planner board member. Bottorff gave a brief description of the

various examples of “justice” he had seen in the court system over the years. He thanked area lawyers, Judge Moore and Ms. Oca who gave of personal time last year to spend evenings at a variety of site visits he coordinated in the tornado-damaged areas of Clark County in 2012.

The traveling group worked to try to offer legal and tax-related information with people whose homes had been damaged. “Bob is the kind of lawyer volunteer who has helped make a difference in this community effort” said Oca.

The Self Help Center has been aided in its mission by several citizen donations to support its supply and computer module services. A planning computerized tool titled “The Road to the Courthouse” has been developed by the Center for those persons who meet a federal poverty level guideline to utilize divorce forms provided by the Indiana Supreme Court for certain document preparation.

Other information modules are in place. The next module under study is to create a Spanish based instructional module to help Hispanic individuals with court forms, according to Oca.

Oca and Judge Moore, in his remarks, thanked Kevin Cecil of Your Community Bank and Mr. Pat Glotzbach of the New Washington Bank for supporting Center work and the luncheon event. The Estopinal Group, architects, has provided the sign and sign-related services at the courthouse. The Center has received help and support from the Indiana Bar Foundation, whose Director Chuck Dunlap attended the luncheon, and the Community Foundation of Southern Indiana, which was represented by Dr. Joe Jacobi and Ms. Crystal Guenther.

The Judge also gave particular thanks to those families, local attorneys and business people who made donations to support the Center’s work, whether large or small. “The small donations help the effort, just as much as any. All donations come from the heart and that is gratifying. These citizens whose names appear on the Board at the courthouse have stepped up to show a commitment for service and should be applauded” he said.

In mentioning corporate Patrons Judge Moore applauded the commitment of The KFC Alice Schleicher Group, Margie Jenkins, Clark and Brenda Nickels, Donna Coomer, the Stemler Group, Independent Piping, Estes Excavating, local engineers Jacobi Toombs and Lanz. He also expressed gratitude for the help of retired attorney Elmer Hoehn, Sherry Routh, retired

Judge “Tiny” Barthold , Dr. Ashvin Padhya , Clark –Floyd Landfill and former Commissioner Ed Meyer. These and all supporters who made donations were thanked for their open and visible support of this effort.

Judge Moore particularly recognized the Clark Commissioners for providing the space for the Center and for continued support of this effort to serve the community. Commissioner John Perkins attended the luncheon and spoke of his personal and continued commitment.

The Judge also thanked Sen. Ron Grooms, Rep. Steve Stemler, Sen. Jim Smith and for ongoing support. “These state leaders are a key component of this success” Moore said.

“The luncheon was a big success and is an energizing event to continue in our community-wide partnerships to support those less fortunate in our community,” Robinson stated. He, along with Conrad, Bottorff, Bar President Tom Thomas, Mary Fondrisi, and a host of other area attorneys, volunteer at the Center Self Help Desk on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons from 1:30 to 3:30 each week. The Center website is at clarklegalselfhelp.com.

Indiana Legal Services Inc. has an office in New Albany and may be contacted concerning volunteer work, donations or other types of support.