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BAR FOUNDATION GRANTS

Bar Foundation Grants Are Up By 21 Percent

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The Philadelphia Bar Foundation, the charitable arm of the Philadelphia Bar Association, is awarding 21 percent more in grant funds this year, foundation President Edward F. Chacker of Gay Chacker & Mittin has announced.

The bar foundation is spreading the wealth among a wide variety of legal services organizations, and many of those groups already know how to put the money to good use.

The increased grant-making ability is the product of increased fund-raising in 2003, under the leadership of the foundations's immediate past president, Gerald A. McHugh Jr. of Litvin Blumberg Matusow & Young. Last year, the foundation collected \$338,500 for grants to be used over the course of 2004. Much of that money came from donations from local firms and individual attorneys.

Last year, the foundation was able to donate \$280,000 to various organizations.

Twenty-seven organizations have received grants ranging from \$2,000 to \$98,000 to be used over the course of this year. In addition, \$23,000 will go toward an immigration issues initiative involving the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, the Nationalities Services Center and the Pennsylvania Immigration Resource Center; and the foundation has donated a \$5,000 award to the National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women.

Chacker, who served in 1999 as chancellor of the bar association, said that a committee of six lawyers considers grant proposals and makes recommendations to the foundation's board on how the money should be allocated.

"We made a philosophical decision a few years ago that we would only fund direct legal service providers," Chacker said. In the past, he noted, grants had been given to organizations such as the Committee of Seventy and the Center City District.

Other changes aimed at cost-cutting and additional fund-raising have been enacted, Chacker said. Last year, the foundation's board

was virtually cut in half -- from 41 members to 21 -- and now, each member is obligated to contribute at least \$2,000 to the organization.

Chacker also said that last year's chairwoman of the bar's Board of Governors, Jane Leslie Dalton, is for the second year heading a campaign that allows any lawyer to become a member of the foundation by donating \$100. And under an initiative set up by McHugh, 23 donors have committed to pledges of \$25,000 each.

"We've made progress this year, but we have a vigorous long-range agenda and much more to accomplish," McHugh said in a statement. "We're encouraged as we look forward."

The foundation even pared down the budget for last year's annual Andrew Hamilton Ball by doing away with the books of sponsors handed out at the event and printed at a cost of \$25,000, Chacker said. Instead, ads listing the sponsors' names were taken out in the Sunday *Philadelphia Inquirer* and other local media.

There have also been changes to the foundation's structure, said foundation Executive Director Maureen Minge. Where in the past the foundation's executive director was an employee of the bar association, current and future executive directors will report directly to the foundation's board and president. And starting next year, the foundation's president will serve a two-year, not a one-year, term.

Additionally, Minge said, the foundation now employs Merrill Zebe, who acts as a coordinator for the bar association's delivery of legal services committee and as a liaison to grantees and volunteering firms.

Chacker said that this year, without passing through donations from local banks and philanthropies, the foundation was able to fully fund all its grants, pay off its debt to the bar association (for overhead and operating costs) and still emerge debt free.

"From a financial point of view, we're really doing incredibly well," Chacker said.

The goal now, he said, is to double the



EDWARD F. CHACKER

organization's \$3.2 million endowment over the next few years. With 4 percent of the endowment allowed to be spent on grants per annum, any increase in endowment means more money for local legal public interest groups.

"One of the nice things about bar foundation grants," said Catherine Carr, the executive director of Community Legal Services, "is that it's just general

operating support. We can use it for the most demanding issues that come up but don't have to specify in advance that we'll use it for specific types of cases."

As in recent years, CLS was the top grantee for 2004, with a \$98,000 grant. Carr said that much of the grant money would most likely go toward assisting clients in this year's top area of CLS concern: mortgage foreclosures as a result of predatory lending.

According to Minge, the two top grantees after CLS were the Volunteers for the Indigent Program, with \$40,000, and the Support Center for Child Advocates, with \$20,000. VIP requested funds for general operating expenses; the SCCA was looking for money to supplement its child victim assistance project, which aims at providing abused and neglected children in the court system with a social worker and a volunteer attorney.

All legal services organizations funded by the foundation will receive free use of legal research tools through a donation by LexisNexis, Minge said.

"The bar foundation just seems like it's doing a really great job in terms of trying to grow on the money they have to give away and pushing their mission to develop funds to support the public interest community," Carr said. "I think that they're poised to do even better in coming years."

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