

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 29, 2011

**JUSTICE KARMEIER, CHIEF JUDGE CALLIS, SUPREME COURT
COMMISSION ON PROFESSIONALISM AND MADISON COUNTY
LAWYERS ANNOUNCE MENTORING PROGRAM FOR NEW ATTORNEYS**

EDWARDSVILLE – Justice Lloyd A. Karmeier of the Illinois Supreme Court and Chief Judge Ann E. Callis of the Third Judicial Circuit announced Wednesday that the Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism is teaming up with lawyers in the Metro East area to stimulate a mentoring program for newly admitted attorneys.

The program in Madison County is part of a statewide initiative by the Commission on Professionalism to urge attorney groups, law schools and individual lawyers to take an active hand in ensuring that new attorneys get practical professional guidance after the rigors of law school.

The early years of legal practice are among the most challenging for most attorneys. Recent law school graduates generally receive limited practical and clinical experience while in law school, and the months leading up to their admission to the bar are spent in extensive preparation for the two-day bar exam, which consists of essay and multiple choice questions with no gauge of clinical or practical experience.

In such an environment, experienced attorney mentors can prove invaluable in helping recent bar admittees learn the actual practice of law, and get a meaningful start in their legal careers.

“When I entered the practice of law,” Justice Karmeier said, “mentoring was an established part of our profession. The newer lawyers looked to more experienced practitioners for guidance in handling the day-to-day practice of law, and they were happy to provide it. The most important lessons we learned: that your first duty is to your client, that your word is your bond, that you should treat other attorneys as you wish to be treated, were lessons taught by those who preceded us in the profession.

“Unfortunately, as the practice has grown and evolved, many new lawyers simply do not have the same opportunity for constructive interaction with established members of their local legal communities. Through the mentoring program, we hope to provide them with that opportunity. In so doing, we also hope to instill among established practitioners a renewed awareness of how their support and encouragement of their new colleagues will ultimately benefit the profession as a whole.

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“I commend Chief Judge Callis for her leadership in encouraging a mentoring program among established lawyers and new admittees and for her efforts in instilling an awareness to the importance of professionalism among our judges and our attorneys. I also compliment Ron Foster of the Madison County Bar Association for his commitment to this worthwhile program, and on behalf of the Chief Justice and the entire Supreme Court, thank the Commission on Professionalism for its tireless efforts in this area.”

Chief Judge Callis has been a consistent leader in improving professionalism among judges and lawyers in the Third Judicial Circuit. Behind her efforts, the Circuit established a Professionalism Committee and adopted an Aspirational Code of Professionalism for judges and lawyers in 2007.

“I fully support the mentoring initiative and stand ready to foster the program in any possible way,” said Chief Judge Callis. “More and more lately, we see new lawyers hang out a shingle in solo practice. It is no easy task for new attorneys just out of law school to navigate their way through the early practice of law. They could use a helping hand and I am appreciative that our seasoned attorneys have agreed to lend it.

“The Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism has developed a blueprint for mentoring to succeed and we are committed to doing what we can so that it does.”

Jayne Reardon, executive director of the Commission, applauded Chief Judge Callis and leaders of the Madison County bar for embracing the concept of lawyer mentoring and recruiting experienced attorneys to participate.

“Lawyer-to-lawyer mentoring is a proven means of passing along the highest aspirations of the legal profession to the next generation of attorneys,” said Ms. Reardon. “Mentoring relationships cultivate a sense of pride and purpose in the practice of law, while conveying non-academic wisdom such as ethical and professional behavior, the skills of civility, integrity and inclusion and effectively finding a balance between one’s work and one’s personal life.”

Earlier this month, Supreme Court Chief Justice Thomas L. Kilbride announced the start of the statewide mentoring initiative, making Illinois one of only a handful of states with a formalized mentoring program. The Peoria County Bar Association and the University of Illinois College of Law became early program administrators.

“I am excited and pleased to announce our support of the lawyer-to-lawyer mentoring program,” said Ronald J. Foster Jr., president of the Madison County Bar Association. “It is my goal to dedicate the necessary resources to ensure the success of this invaluable program. We look forward to working with the Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism and the Professionalism Committee of the Third Judicial Circuit to make it a success in our area.”

Circuit Court Judge Richard L. Tognarelli, a member of the Professionalism Commission and co-chair with Chief Judge Callis of the Third Judicial Circuit Professionalism Committee, noted

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the importance of groups like the Madison County Bar Association in assuming stewardship for the mentoring program in the area.

“Although the Commission has worked diligently to develop the Mentoring Plan and Program Guide, we agree that ultimately the mentoring program is best run on a local level by law schools, bar associations, law firms and individual lawyers,” said Judge Tognarelli. “We need the involvement of people familiar with the local practice not only to identify who will be good mentors for law school graduates, but also to tailor the template developed by the Commission so it suits the character and culture of regional practice norms.”

Chief Justice Kilbride, Justice Karmer, Chief Judge Callis and leaders of the Madison County Bar Association believe that a change in Supreme Court rules covering Continuing Legal Education (CLE) for attorneys in Illinois will stir motivation among experienced attorneys and newly admitted attorneys to take part in a mentoring relationship.

Chief Judge Callis, Judge Tognarelli and the Third Circuit’s Professionalism Committee were instrumental in the petition to the Supreme Court to change the rule to spur mentoring.

More than 2,000 law school graduates are admitted to the practice of law each year in Illinois, and there are more than 90,000 licensed attorneys in the state. Mr. Foster estimates that there are about 50 new lawyers eligible for mentoring under the program now, and more to follow this year when new lawyers are sworn in across the state in November.

Under new Supreme Court Rule 795(d) (12), a mentor and a new lawyer may each receive up to six hours of professional responsibility CLE credit upon successful completion of a pre-approved mentoring program. Ms. Reardon said that the Commission on Professionalism has prepared a CLE credit-qualifying program that will allow attorneys to engage in a structured mentoring relationship benefitting the professional development of both experienced and new attorneys.

“The Commissioners are excited about promoting the mentoring program statewide,” Gordon Nash, Chair of the Commission, said in a statement. “We are optimistic that this program, with structured interactions between experienced and new lawyers, not only will transmit core values to the newest lawyers, but also will energize and elevate the professionalism of the entire bar.”

Under Chief Judge Janet Holmgren, the 17th Judicial Circuit, which includes Boone and Winnebago counties in northern Illinois, was the first jurisdiction to implement a mentoring program. Every newly admitted attorney in the Circuit was matched with a more experienced attorney. Participants were surveyed and outcomes were tracked upon completion of the first year of the program, and feedback from the project was used to provide a foundation to move forward with a new rule encouraging mentoring statewide.

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The Supreme Court adopted the new mentoring rule in October 2010. Drawing upon the best practices developed in 17th Circuit and the input of a statewide advisory committee, the Commission on Professionalism developed documents and aids to guide attorneys and organizations across Illinois seeking to undertake a mentoring program qualifying for CLE credit.

The documents include a comprehensive mentoring plan to guide mentoring pairs through activities and discussions throughout their participation in the 12-month program. What makes the program unique and flexible is its reliance upon local administration by organizations such as the Peoria Bar Association, law schools, and law firms rather than top-down direction from a statewide entity.

The Commission on Professionalism was established by the Illinois Supreme Court in September 2005 to help foster increased civility, professionalism and inclusiveness among the lawyers and judges in the state. Formal establishment of the Commission was recommended by a Committee on Civility initiated by Supreme Court Justice Robert R. Thomas, who is the current Supreme Court liaison to the Commission on Professionalism. Justice Thomas was concerned that effective client advocacy had morphed into “Rambo” litigation tactics.

The Commission’s duties are defined in Supreme Court Rule 799. The Commission consists of a Chair, law school faculty, judges, lawyers and non-lawyers appointed by the Court to serve volunteer terms of three years.

No taxpayer money or general revenue state funds are used in its administration or operation. It is funded totally by a portion of the annual license fee payable by active Illinois attorneys.

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