

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**SUPREME COURT JUSTICE KARMEIER, DEAN FOUNTAINE OF SIU
SCHOOL OF LAW AND JACKSON COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION
ANNOUNCE MENTORING PROGRAM FOR NEW ATTORNEYS**

CARBONDALE -- Justice Lloyd A. Karmeier, Dean Cynthia Fountaine and a bar association leader announced Thursday that the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism is teaming up with the Southern Illinois University School of Law and Jackson County attorneys to begin a mentoring program for newly admitted lawyers.

The announcement 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 were that your first duty is to your client, that your word is your bond, and that you should treat other attorneys as you wish to be treated. These were the 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.

MORE

New Attorney Mentoring Program Add One

“I want to commend Dean Fountaine and the Jackson County Bar Association for their leadership in committing the School of Law and Jackson County senior attorneys to collaborate with the Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism and help implement a mentoring program for newly admitted lawyers. I am confident it will be a beneficial relationship not only for the mentors and the mentees, but for the profession as a whole and for the public we all serve.”

The SIU School of Law has been a leader in the professional development of its students. An orientation program emphasizing the professional commitment and behavior required of lawyers has been used as a model by the Commission on Professionalism and introduced in a smaller, modified format at other law schools in Illinois. As part of the SIU program, Justice Karameier presides over a formal ceremony and leads the group of new law students reciting a Declaration of Professional Commitment.

At the urging of the Commission, the practice has caught on. At smaller orientation ceremonies, Supreme Court justices lead new students in a Pledge of Professionalism at other law schools in Illinois at the start of the academic year.

Dean Fountaine, who received her *juris doctor* degree from the University of Southern California Gould School of Law, said she welcomes the opportunity for SIU to build on its reputation for instilling the values of professionalism and become a program administrator for the mentoring initiative in Illinois.

She said it is a rewarding way for successful alumni to give back to the university and to the community.

“This program offers great potential to leverage what is and has been a focus of my deanship to equip our graduates with the practical skills, professionalism and judgment necessary for success in their careers,” said Dean Fountaine. “At the end of the day, as we discuss in our professional responsibility classes, although the world is changing rapidly, there are core values of our profession dating back practically to the beginning of our country. This is what connects us from the beginning of law school through the end of our careers.”

“Many lawyers I have spoken to who graduated from SIU School of Law are energized about this way to give back to the university and to contribute to their profession in this way.

Earlier this month, Chief Justice Thomas L. Kilbride introduced the statewide mentoring initiative at a news conference in Springfield, where Mark Hassakis of Mt. Vernon, past president of the Illinois State Bar Association (ISBA), pledged his group’s support to the project and to help local bar groups in furthering it anyway possible.

Carey C. Gill, a member of the ISBA governing Assembly and former president of the Jackson County Bar Association, reiterated that support and said Jackson County attorneys will be part of the mentoring network with the county bar association also serving as a mentoring program administrator.

MORE

New Attorney Mentoring Program

Add Two

“The mentoring program created by the Illinois Supreme Court and its Commission on Professionalism will be an excellent program for new lawyers as they begin their practice,” said Ms. Gill. “The Illinois State Bar Association and Jackson County Bar Association fully support it.”

Illinois Appellate Justice Stephen L. Spomer of the 5th Judicial District has been a member of the Commission on Professionalism since its inception in 2005. “The Commission has worked diligently to develop the Mentoring Plan and Program guide for this project and we agree that ultimately the mentoring program is best run on a local level by law schools, bar associations and law firms,” said Appellate Justice Spomer. “We need the involvement of people familiar with the local practice not only to identify who will be good mentors for young law school graduates, but also to tailor the template developed by the Commission on Professionalism so it suits the character and culture of regional practice norms.

“The Commission can only accomplish its goals through collaboration with caring individuals and organizations, and we are grateful that Southern Illinois University School of Law and the Jackson County Bar Association have agreed to be program administrators for the lawyer-to-lawyer mentoring program.”

Also extolling the project was Jesse Rochman, a young lawyer who received his *juris doctor* from Southern Illinois cum laude. He is an associate with the Sandberg Phoenix law firm with its main offices in St. Louis and offices in southern Illinois.

Jayne Reardon, executive director of the Commission, applauded Dean Fountaine and the Jackson 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. Justice Karmeier and Chief Judge Ann Callis of the Third Judicial Circuit announced on Wednesday that the Madison County Bar Association also was becoming a program administrator. Other law schools and bar associations in Illinois are expected to follow.

Chief Justice Kilbride, Justice Karmeier, and the Commission 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.

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. A class of new attorneys was sworn in in May and about 2,500 are expected to be sworn in as attorneys in November.

MORE

New Attorney Mentoring Program Add Three

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.

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.

(FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT: Joseph Tybor, press secretary to the Illinois Supreme Court, at 312.636.0479 (cell); or Jayne Reardon, executive director of the Commission on Professionalism, at 312.363.6210)