

Mullen wants to reach all judges

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"What I hope is that we would have every judge in the state make a donation to the Illinois Judges Foundation, even if it is a small donation, as a gesture of solidarity for the goals of the foundation," she said.

While Mullen's mission could be construed as a challenge given the state's roster of judges tops 900 and doesn't even include retired judges, her colleagues said they do not doubt that she will accomplish her goal.

Second District Appellate Court Justice Mary Seminara Schostok said, "If Margaret says she is going to do something, she's going to do it." Schostok has known Mullen, 55, for several years. She used to appear before Mullen, who took a seat behind the bench in 1992, during her time as an assistant Lake County state's attorney. Instead of "your honor," Schostok now refers to Mullen as "my BFF," which stands for "best friends forever."

Schostok said she can't think of anyone better to lead the IJF and help further its mission to promote public confidence in the judiciary, foster awareness of the court system and facilitate diversity in the legal profession.

"She is just an enthusiastic worker and is committed to this cause," Schostok said. "She wants to reach out to all of the judges so we go beyond the same people and get new people involved and I think with her tenacity and personality, she'll be able to do it."

Cook County Circuit Judge Jesse G. Reyes agreed and as a past president of the group, said he knows the challenges that Mullen will face this year.

He served as president of the IJF during the first two years of its existence. The organization was officially created in 2007 through a gift from the Illinois Judges Association (IJA) with the goal of serving as its philanthropic arm.

"We're still new to the foundational world and have had growing pains like any other young organization," Reyes said. "She's very dynamic. She's also a very dedicated person and is definitely devoted to the foundation and the efforts we've established so I think she will do a great job during her year as president."

Reyes said like all new presidents, Mullen came in with her own agenda, which included the idea to "leave no judge behind."

"It's a challenging one, but she's done very well so far reaching out to judges throughout the state, both active and retired," he said. "She's always up for a challenge and has that type of personality to try something out to see if it works. You have to be a little bit of a risk taker in foundational work and I think she is."

Sworn in as the group's president in June, Mullen hasn't wasted any time getting to work, said Kathy Hosty, the IJF's executive director.

"She has already done so much for our foundation," Hosty said, explaining that Mullen made it a point to reach out to judges across the state, rather than just those from Chicago and its surrounding counties.

"A lot of downstate judges are starting to get involved," Hosty said. "She's a very approachable judge who wants to bring everyone together to really further the foundation."

Earlier this summer, the IJF started to organize its donor base through a computerized system, something Mullen said will make it easier to contact and keep track of its donors.

Mullen said she knows other charities and organizations have needs, especially during tough economic times, but said she hopes her fellow colleagues behind the bench see the benefit in donating to the foundation.

"We, as judges, have a valuable perspective as to where money should be applied to benefit the legal system," she said.

Mullen said the IJF — which has a cubicle at The Chicago Bar Association and holds occasional meetings in donated space at Tabet, DiVito & Rothstein LLC — uses the donations it receives each year to fund at least three programs.

It funds the American Bar Association's Judicial Intern Opportunity Program, which gives first- and second-year law students a "bird's eye view of the judiciary," Mullen said.

Minority or financially disadvantaged law students across the nation can participate in the program, she said, adding that the interns get a stipend for spending the summer as a judicial law clerk.

Mullen said the IJF gives the ABA about \$25,000 each year to help fund the program. This year, nearly 200 law students participated in the ABA internship program.

In addition, Mullen said the IJF funds the Judge Harold Sullivan Law School Scholarship, a \$5,000 scholarship awarded to one of the nine Illinois law schools each year. The group named it in honor of the late Cook County judge who helped found the IJA.

The IJF also funds "7 Reasons to Leave the Party," an IJA program that puts judges in front

of students to talk about the legal and personal consequences of drinking and driving.

In its nearly four-year existence, Mullen said the IJF has managed to make a difference with these programs. She also said the group's spring reception and summer baseball outing have already turned into "signature events."

"I think it's important for judges to have a mechanism to express their philanthropy and that's what IJF does uniquely," she said.

At the suggestion of IJF's vice president, Cook County Circuit Judge Michael B. Hyman, Mullen said the group will host a strategic planning session next month.

"We are hoping to get a group together to focus on shared goals so we can move forward," Mullen said.

When Mullen isn't working to connect with all of the state's active and retired judges in her role with the IJF, she keeps busy at her day job as presiding judge of the Lake County's Law Division.

She also enjoys gardening, swimming, waterskiing and answering the occasional legal question from her daughter, a first-year law student at The John Marshall Law School, her alma mater.