

Judges clear hurdle, fire up foundation

By John Flynn Rooney
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The Illinois Judges Association's charitable arm has laid its ethical foundation and has launched ambitious plans for the coming year according to the organization's new president.

The group jump-started the Illinois Judges Association foundation in 2007 by committing \$200,000 in funding. The charity was created in name only in 2000.

"We've invested that money," said 3d Judicial Circuit Judge Barbara L. Crowder, who became the foundation's president in June. "Now we're hoping to get additional contributions to do good works."

The foundation will hold a fundraiser next April, and it also plans to unveil a "friends program," under which individuals can donate to the foundation at varying levels, she said.

"We're pretty excited," Crowder continued in a telephone interview. "This year we get some ... more concrete things underway."

The IJA has dreamed about and planned for a fundraising arm for a number of years, said 1st District Appellate Justice Mary Jane Theis, who ended her one-year term as foundation president last month. "It wasn't functioning because it was at the planning stage."

During Theis tenure, the foundation awarded a \$5,000 grant to the North-western University School of Law, to help fund scholarships of law students.

Since 2000, the IJA has annually presented the Harold W. Sullivan Scholarship to Promote Judicial Ethics on a rotating basis to Illinois law schools. The scholarships are in the name of the Cook County jurist, who helped create the IJA and who stressed judicial ethics and education.

This year marked the first time that foundation funds were used to fund the scholarship program, according to Theis. Dues and donations from IJA members were previously used to fund the scholarship program.

The foundation also gave \$5,000 to the Judicial Intern Opportunity Program, through which minority and/or economically deprived law students work with trial judges throughout the state, Crowder said.

"That allows the students to get experience they might not otherwise have," Crowder added.

All of the foundation's policies have been vetted-by an ethics committee chaired by Lake County Circuit Judge Raymond J. McKoski, Crowder said.

"We're very careful," Crowder added.

"Judges live with a different awareness of ethical concerns," Theis said.

For example, the Illinois Code of Judicial Conduct prohibits active judges from soliciting funds.

"But the Illinois Judges Association can solicit funds so long as it's not a sitting judge that makes a direct solicitation of a prospective donor," McKoski said in a Monday telephone interview.

The foundation's executive director and retired judges on the foundation's board, however, could sign a solicitation letter, sign an invitation to a fundraising event or make phone call or in-person solicitation for the foundation, he added.

Illinois Supreme Court Rule 61 allows judges to speak at the fundraising events and make presentations or distribute awards, according to McKoski.

"They just cannot ask for money at the event," McKoski said.

"The foundation is very scrupulous in its approach to all fundraising activities, whether that's a fundraising event or a solicitation letter, to avoid any possible perception that a judge is requesting any funding," McKoski said. "We're equally scrupulous to avoid any indication that the prestige of judicial office is being used to support a fundraising effort."

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