

# Firms Give Back During the Holiday Season

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Santa thumb

The legal press, ALM included, focuses much of its time on the flaws of the profession—low morale in Big Law, greedy partners, law schools that fail or fall short, unethical judges. After all, news is news.

But in the spirit of the holidays, we're giving that a rest and highlighting the good work law firms are undertaking, especially this season. Whether it's through community service or pro bono projects, the legal profession each year gives back—in a big way. In pro bono hours alone, about 130 major law firms donated an aggregate 4.2 million hours last year, according to the Pro Bono Institute, which tallied hours from firms that signed on to its Pro Bono

## Challenge.

In recent years, law firms have increased their efforts to combine the acts of giving money and of donating their legal skills to their communities, said Eve Runyon, president and CEO of the Pro Bono Institute. In other words, they're not just dropping coins in the Salvation Army pot, for example; They're donating their legal talents to individuals whom the Salvation Army strives to help.

Among the many community service and pro bono projects underway this season, here are a few of the more unusual, touching and creative efforts that demonstrate the generous spirit of the legal profession.

About 30 lawyers from Hogan Lovells' Washington office signed up to lay holiday wreaths at the Arlington National Cemetery on Dec. 17 as part of the Wreaths Across America project. Because the volunteers might have been the first to visit some of the graves in years, they took the time to read each stone in honor of the memory of those who are buried there.

Latham & Watkins' Washington office is working with the Children's Law Center to sponsor 45 children in need. Each sponsored child will receive two items from his or her wish list, a gift card to be used to purchase a full outfit of new clothing (including pants, shirt and shoes) and a gift card to be used by the family to purchase a holiday meal. The firm's San Diego office raised more than \$6,000 for Heart4Refugees, which was used in part to buy Thanksgiving meals for 200 newly arrived Syrian refugee families, a way of welcoming people to the country. Latham lawyers and staff helped deliver these meals, which included roasted turkey, mashed potatoes and pumpkin pie.

This year, as in the last several years, DLA Piper partner Michael Sheehan in Chicago, who heads the firm's U.S. employment group, served as Santa Claus

and host of a holiday party for residents of a local shelter for abused woman and their children. (In the safety interests of those at the shelter, we can't name the shelter or the date of the event.) Before he went, Sheehan received a gift list from the women and their children and went out on his own and with donations from others to buy their Christmas presents.

Earlier this month, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom held its inaugural pro bono holiday party, where it invited nine small to mid-sized nonprofit clients who serve underprivileged communities in New York. Among the nonprofits were Matriculate, an organization that helps students in need get into top colleges, and The Financial Clinic, a group that helps poor working families. Attorneys met face-to-face with the smaller nonprofits, which lack the ability to hold large-scale holiday fundraisers, and learned about how to provide pro bono help and make holiday donations.

Kirkland & Ellis attorneys and staff in New York contributed more than 1,500 gifts to underprivileged children, teens and seniors through New York Cares' Winter Wishes program. Kirkland answered 500 letters submitted by participants in two programs dedicated to housing and helping victims of domestic violence. Lawyers and staff purchased boots and clothing for seniors and children, who also received bicycles and toys.

In its video holiday greeting card, Norton Rose Fulbright unveiled its global charitable initiative in support of the Nelson Mandela Foundation. The goals of the organization are to provide shelter, education, literacy, food and security worldwide to communities in need. In February, about 100 volunteers from Norton Rose, working with the foundation, are set to team up with Habitat for Humanity to build homes and food gardens in Johannesburg, South Africa.

In an ongoing case, Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton is representing a

Vietnam veteran who has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, in an eviction action brought against him by the board at his senior living facility in Southern California. Sheppard Mullin and the attorneys at the Public Law Center of Orange County assert that the facility and its parent company need procedures in place to deal with disabled persons. A deposition of the veteran was scheduled the week before Christmas. The firm got it moved to after the new year.

Among Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr's community service projects and pro bono work firmwide, a group of about 25 people in its Denver office this year launched a Random Acts of Kindness initiative, which encourages office members and their families to record their good deeds on ornaments and hang them on the office tree. The goal is to have at least 25 ornaments displayed by Dec. 23.

Greenberg Traurig's Tallahassee office is participating in the Elder Elf program through Elder Care Services Inc. Elder Elf volunteers fulfill wish lists for elderly people in need. The office is sponsoring six individuals and has 25 workers (both attorneys and nonattorneys) participating. On Dec. 15, the teams gathered to wrap the gifts, and on Dec. 16, they delivered the items to the folks. The firm's Las Vegas office is participating in the Stuff the Bus program, which people at the firm help fill a bus with unwrapped gifts for the children of the Department of Family Services who are in foster care.

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