

## Pro bono attorney Bill Scheu helps launch SAPD program

05/24/2010

by Kathy Para

JBA Pro Bono Committee Chair

### Achieves positive outcome for client

Bill Scheu's profession deals mostly with the white-collar world of commercial properties: the acquisition, development and leasing of shopping centers and such. And he does it well. The Rogers Towers attorney has been practicing for 40 years, and in that time he has accumulated many impressive credentials, such as a Martindale-Hubbell AV Preeminent Rating, Florida Trend's "Legal Elite," Florida Super Lawyers and The Best Lawyers in America.

What Scheu has not done is delve into the oft-messy and emotional world of criminal law.

But when the Fourth Judicial Circuit Public Defender's Office launched its "Pro Bono Opportunities" program and put out a call for Jacksonville-area attorneys to lend a hand in representing accused people who could not afford to pay for legal help, Scheu viewed it not only as a way to give back to the community, but also as a way to experience an area of the legal profession he never thought he'd get to experience.

"I originally thought the Public Defender's program would just be a good opportunity for younger lawyers to gain courtroom experience, and hopefully trial experience," Scheu said. "But then I thought it could also be an interesting experience for some of us older lawyers who practice in non-litigation areas — a way to get back into the courtroom after many years' absence. So I signed up."

Moving out from his familiar world of million-dollar real estate deals, Scheu took on the case of a young woman accused of fighting with a bartender. With the strong support of the Public Defender's Office, Scheu went to bat for the accused woman and wound up working out a "very favorable outcome" for the client.

"Public Defender Investigator Hal Bennett did a superb job," Scheu said. "I was very impressed with his work, and with the work of the attorneys in the Public Defender's Office who were helping us, notably Cynthia Hunold. I was also very impressed with Judge Eleni Derke, who brought a sense of both discipline and compassion to the proceedings in which I participated and those which I observed."

Scheu, a University of Florida Law School graduate, said the budget shortfalls that are now hitting federal, state and local governments could very likely taint the justice system if something isn't done. Without pro bono attorneys, he said, defendants such as the young woman he represented might not get as favorable an outcome as he was able to obtain for her, and justice would not be well served.

"I gained a new appreciation for the work of both the State Attorney's Office and that of the Public Defender's Office," Scheu said. "Their caseloads are huge. They have to learn to think on their feet. I think every lawyer would benefit from doing these cases, and the citizens would be very well served."

This is exactly the kind of sentiment Public Defender Matt Shirk hoped would result from the program.

"When we gain new attorneys through this program, everyone benefits," Shirk said when announcing the Pro Bono Opportunities program



William Scheu Jr.

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that started in January. "The clients receive great attention from their Special Assistant Public Defender, the participant receives valuable experience in criminal law, and the Public Defender's Office is able to do more without additional burden to taxpayers."

For more information on becoming involved in the Special Assistant Public Defender pro bono program, contact Cynthia Hunold, Director of County Court Unit, at [cch@pd4.coj.net](mailto:cch@pd4.coj.net).

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