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Group honors lawyers' service

Lawyers Lend-A-Hand to Youth Program recognizes those who mentor students

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Kathryn C. Thomas found a way for Freeborn & Peters LLP to recognize its 25th anniversary after attending a presentation about a mentorship program.

After Thomas told firm officials about Chicago Scholars President Karen Foley's remarks in 2008 about the organization, the firm decided to donate \$100,000 to it to sponsor 25 students over five years, Thomas said.

"I think that mentoring is an investment that we have to make because it's an investment in the next generation that will pay dividends for all of our futures," she said.

On Thursday, the Lawyers Lend-A-Hand to Youth Program presented its "Law Firm Partnership of the Year Award" to Freeborn & Peters.

The group's formal name is the Sun-Times Judge Marovitz Lawyers Lend-A-Hand to Youth Program.

At the ninth annual My Hero Awards luncheon, Rachel A. Heaston, a senior attorney with Chicago's Legal Assistance Foundation (LAF), received the "Making a Difference Award" and Cook County Circuit Judge James P. Flannery Jr. got the "Judge (Abraham Lincoln) Marovitz Mentoring Award."

Heaston mentored a female high school student and became involved with Voices International, a group that matches professional women with girls in Chicago's Englewood neighborhood, a release from Lawyers Lend-A-Hand said.

Flannery, a veteran judge who sits in the Law Division, mentors other judges.

Thomas, a partner and chairwoman of Freeborn & Peters' diversity and inclusion committee, said she started as a volunteer

with Chicago Scholars four years ago. Thomas and other firm lawyers assist the students, many of whom become the first in their families to attend college, she said.

The lawyers help the students with their college essays and common application forms, she said. The students also participate in workshops about financial aid, she said.

"These are extremely inspiring kids," she said. "These are kids who have against all odds persevered and succeeded."

Stephen R. Miller, counsel at McDermott, Will & Emery LLP, received the "Making a Difference Award."

Miller said he acted as a mentor for three students as part the Center for Companies That Care's AIM High program. It involves providing mentor teams for high school students throughout their four years to help prepare them to gain admission to and attend an accredited university, he said.

Miller said of his participation in the AIM High program, "It is helping a kid with no future achieve a great future."

Miller said he recently provided guidance to A'Shonti McKinney, who graduated from the University of Chicago Charter School's Woodlawn campus earlier this year.

Miller said he attended one of McKinney's dance recitals.

Several weeks ago, Miller and another McDermott, Will & Emery employee attended a "trunk party" for McKinney at her mother's home in Chicago's Englewood neighborhood. They brought items including clothing and toiletries for McKinney, he said. Such parties occur for students about to head off to college who invite people to give them gifts to put in a trunk.

McKinney now attends the University of Iowa, he said.

"I think the thing that strikes me over and over again is that



Laura J. Hlavacek (left), a Chicago Scholars board member, received a hug from Kathryn C. Thomas of Freeborn & Peters LLP, who accepted the Lawyers Lend-A-Hand to Youth Program's "Law Firm Partnership of the Year Award" at the ninth annual My Hero Awards Luncheon on Thursday. *Natalie Battaglia*



Cook County Circuit Judge James P. Flannery Jr. received applause as he accepted the "Judge Marovitz Mentoring Award" at the ninth annual My Hero Awards Luncheon on Thursday. *Natalie Battaglia*

these kids have a lot of untapped potential about which they are not even aware," he said. "They have an opportunity like college and what doors college can open that they know nothing about."

As part of the AIM High program, students participate in a shadow day with their mentor teams at the law firm, he said. Students in the program also become eligible for a three-week internship following their junior

year of high school.

Thomas M. Staunton, a Miller, Shakman & Beem LLP partner, and chairman of the luncheon awards committee, said that long-term mentoring relationships improve the lives of children.

"I think the great thing about the luncheon is hearing the honorees' stories and seeing how important these relationships are not just to the children but also to the lawyer mentors," he said.