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A large crowd gathers to honor seven local lawyers

By Jerry Crimmins
Law Bulletin staff writer

In front of 780 people, “the largest turnout we’ve ever had,” seven lawyers received the Chicago Bar Association’s and Chicago Bar Foundation’s pro bono and public service awards Tuesday.

One award was made posthumously to Frederick H. Cohen of Goldberg, Kohn Ltd.

While he fought kidney cancer, Cohen was lead trial counsel in a class-action lawsuit alleging that children in Cook County covered by Medicaid were not receiving adequate health care, according to the award.

Cohen’s wife, Dana, accepted the Edward J. Lewis II Pro Bono Service Award for her husband who died in May at 45.

“He didn’t know what he was getting into when he answered this little call for help,” Dana Cohen told the audience in the Fairmont Chicago Hotel. “He didn’t know answering this one call would take his whole career in a new direction.”

The case, *Memisovski, et al. v. Wright et al.*, No. 92 C 1982, led to a consent decree that improved health care for 600,000 children.

Cohen was a litigator in commercial and business disputes and chair of the board of the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law.

Tuesday’s event where Cohen and six other lawyers were honored was the 12th annual Pro Bono and Public Service Awards Luncheon.

Stephen R. Patton of Kirkland & Ellis LLP, who is president of the Chicago Bar Foundation, told the group, “It’s the largest turnout we’ve ever had.”

This was echoed by Robert A. Glaves, CBF executive director, who said, “Standing up here, you should see how crowded this place is.”

Elizabeth A. Cunningham, 30, youth attorney for Youth Futures, received the \$50,000 Kimball R. Anderson and Karen Gatsis Anderson Public Interest Law Fellowship.

Youth Futures is a mobile legal clinic operated by the Law Project of the



Marina Makropoulos

David Mendelsohn (left) of DLA Piper presents the Edward J. Lewis II Pro Bono Service Award to the late Fredrick H. Cohen’s wife, Dana Cohen, (right) during the Chicago Bar Association and the Chicago Bar Foundation 12th Annual Pro Bono and Public Service Awards Luncheon on Tuesday.

Chicago Coalition for the Homeless.

Cunningham said she drives a minivan to shelters and drop-in centers for homeless youth and listens to those with legal problems. She gives them such assistance as getting some enrolled in high school and getting them access to public benefits.

She told the audience that the fellowship, which is to help pay her law school debt, “will enable me to continue doing the work I love so much.” Afterward she said 15,027 homeless children were in Chicago Public Schools during the last school year.

“I’ve practiced in other cities, and I have never seen a bar foundation give more support to legal aid” and the people it serves, she told the audience.

Her parents, Patricia and Timothy

Cunningham of Los Angeles, “taught me the importance of social justice at a very early age,” Cunningham said.

David Mendelsohn of DLA Piper was co-chair of the event, along with Pauline Levy, senior counsel for McDonald’s Corp. They presented the awards.

Mary Anne Smith, vice president and general counsel for the Illinois Institute of Technology, received the Exelon Outstanding Corporate Counsel Award for her pro bono work. She has handled more than 200 cases involving adoptions, guardianships and divorce for low income families.

As a volunteer for Chicago Volunteer Legal Services, Smith founded the Visitation Church Legal Clinic in 1988 and recruited other volunteers to help her staff

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it on Saturdays since then.

Joseph R. Butler, co-executive director of the Veterans Legal Support Center & Clinic at The John Marshall Law School and former director of its Fair Housing Legal Clinic, received the Leonard Jay Schragger Award of Excellence. The award is presented to an attorney in academia “for lasting contributions to improving access to justice for the less fortunate.”

Butler said Schragger was one of his teachers at the school.

Benjamin S. Wolf, director of the Institutionalized Persons Project for the Roger Baldwin Foundation of the

American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois, received the Thomas H. Morsch Public Service Award for a lawyers in public service.

Todd A. Solomon, 36, of McDermott, Will & Emery LLP, who does pro bono work for the Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago, the Community Economic Development Law Project, Equip for Equality and the AIDS Legal Counsel of Chicago, received the Maurice Weigle Exceptional Young Lawyer Award.

Daniel A. Kirk, chief of staff for Cook County State’s Attorney Anita M. Alvarez, who is involved in Teen Living Programs

for homeless teens and is a participant in the Fellows Program for Leadership of Metropolitan Chicago, received the Richard J. Phelan Public Service Award for attorneys in the public sector.

Terri L. Mascherin of Jenner & Block LLP, who is the CBA’s president, told the audience that a certain “Justice Sturgess said, ‘Justice is open to everyone in the same way as the Ritz Hotel.’

“I applaud the work of these seven very special people. Through their time, perseverance and talents, they have cast out lots and lots of keys to the Ritz Hotel.”