

# THE DOCKET

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## DEAL ME IN

NOVEMBER 18, 2016 ♠ LAKE FOREST SPORTSCARS

# Recognizing Volunteerism

It is often said that the true measure of a community is how it treats its less fortunate members. By that measure, Lake County's legal community stands tall. The Lake County legal community has a long established history of fostering a culture of volunteerism to assist people in need. The generous and kind spirit of those who volunteer truly sets Lake County apart. At a time when access to justice is threatened for far too many people, those who volunteer their services ensure that we provide meaningful access to justice for all and help our courts operate more fairly and efficiently.

A prime example is the impressive 70 lawyers, and a smaller number of mental health professionals, who volunteer their services in our family court. These volunteers staff the first floor mediation room on a rotating basis, mediating parental responsibility, parenting time, child support, and other financial issues free of charge to self-represented litigants. Especially given the increase in the number of self-represented litigants in recent years, the service of these volunteers has been of immeasurable benefit to these parties and their children, at a time when they are

most vulnerable and in need of professional guidance.

Similarly, the 19th Judicial Circuit has also implemented a Small Claims Volunteer Mediation program. Dedicated and skilled volunteer mediators, all of whom are lawyers, staff courtrooms 306 and 307 every Thursday, both in the morning and in the afternoon. They mediate consumer collection matters, breach of contract cases, evictions, and every other imaginable type of dispute heard in these courtrooms. The wide variety of legal matters and litigants present an assortment of unique challenges for these dedicated professionals. In spite of those challenges, these mediators successfully resolve the vast majority of the cases that they undertake, and their work is highly praised by litigants, lawyers and judges alike.

Finally, in Juvenile Court, CASA volunteers (CASA stands for "Court Appointed Special Advocates") provide an essential role in helping the most vulnerable children in our community at the most crucial period in their lives. Specially trained CASA volunteers advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children, dedicat-



BY CHIEF JUDGE  
JORGE L. ORTIZ

ed to the premise that each child is entitled to a safe and permanent home. Each case has one to two CASA volunteers depending on the number of children in the family. They work closely with the court, juvenile probation, schools, and other stakeholders and service providers in service to these children and their families. The 252 CASAs volunteering in Lake County today serve as an integral partner in our juvenile justice system, and our successes have not gone unnoticed. At a time when it has been widely reported that children throughout Illinois are languishing in detention centers, psychiatric hospitals and shelters, Lake County's juvenile justice system was recently the subject of a glowing report issued by the John Howard Association. The JHA hails Lake County as a model for juvenile courts, probation departments and

detention centers statewide.<sup>1</sup> This recognition is in no small measure due to the dedicated CASA volunteers willing to give of themselves where few others are willing to step in.

On behalf of the 19th Judicial Circuit and those who visit our courthouse and juvenile justice complex each day, I want to thank the volunteer lawyers/mediators, Court Appointed Special Advocates, and all the others who work pro bono for their exemplary service and dedication.

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<sup>1</sup> The John Howard Association of Illinois, Promoting Transparency and Accountability in Juvenile Detention Facilities: A Report of the John Howard Association's Visit to the Robert W. Depke Juvenile Complex, Lake County, Illinois (2016). <http://www.thejha.org/specialreports>.

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Financial settlements are often a question of understanding how much you need to resume your life without sacrificing your lifestyle.

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Contact us for a complimentary consultation. Divorce is traumatic. We can help relieve you of at least some of the challenges you face.

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