

Local Heroes Receive Aid from ABA Young Lawyers

In the weeks following Sept. 11, 2001, Anthony Hayes, a South Carolina lawyer in the ABA's Young Lawyers Division, asked local firefighters and police what he could do to help their day-to-day lives.

His question turned up a surprising truth: Despite the intense dangers of their jobs, many public safety workers lacked even basic wills to care for their family's needs. Hayes began drafting wills pro bono, and in 2005, he formed the Wills for Heroes Foundation, working with Jeffrey Jacobson, an Arizona prosecutor he had met through YLD.

On Saturday, Feb. 9, the YLD-Wills for Heroes Partnership took another step forward, as lawyers from YLD, the Beverly Hills Bar Association Barristers and Ballard Spahr Andrews & Ingersoll joined forces to draft vital legal papers for about 60 Beverly Hills public safety workers.

YLD Chair Justin Goldstein said he chose the Wills for Heroes program as YLD's 2007-2008 public service project after he was approached by Hayes and Jacobson. YLD has rapidly expanded the reach of Wills for Heroes by partnering with local affiliates, such as the Beverly Hills young lawyers.

"When I heard about this, I was really excited," Goldstein said. "It was already a successful program, it puts lawyers in a positive light, and it exactly fit what YLD can do, by working with local affiliates. This has had an extremely positive reception."

Working in a bustling upstairs room at the Beverly Hills Fire Department on Feb. 9, about 35 lawyers drafted wills, durable power of attorney and health directive documents for an estimated 60 public safety employees and family members. In an adjoining room notaries and witnesses certified the completed documents.

The Beverly Hills program drew universal praise from lawyers, firefighters and from Beverly Hills Mayor Jimmy Delshad, who visited the firehouse to issue a "Wills for Heroes Day" proclamation.



Young lawyers discuss estate information with a Beverly Hills public safety worker.



Left to right, YLD chair Justin Goldstein, Wills for Heroes Foundation founders Anthony Hayes and Jeffrey Jacobson, and YLD deputy director Kristine Gregorio.

Robert Lance, chair of the Beverly Hills Bar Barristers, said local young lawyers have eagerly stepped forward to help.

“The response has been overwhelming. Lawyers are excited about helping first responders,” Lance said. “It’s a way to give back to the community.”

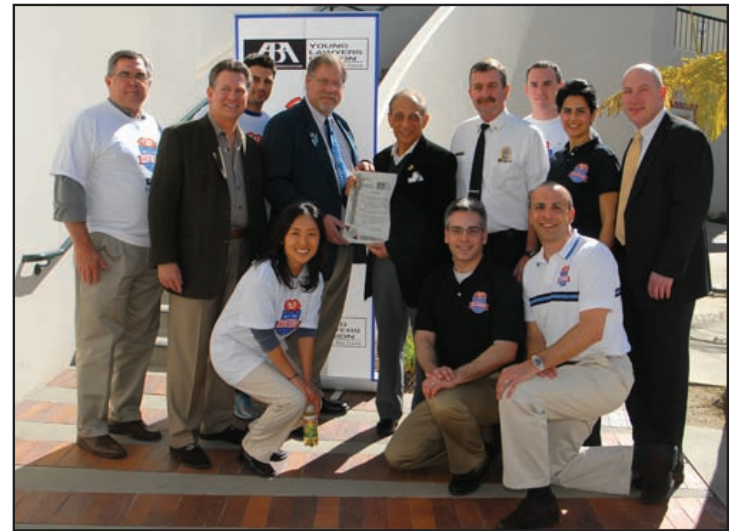
Nationally, Wills for Heroes has drafted vital documents for about 7,000 police, firefighters, paramedics and other public safety workers. Co-founder Jacobson, now a private lawyer in Tucson, said that Wills for Heroes programs are under development in about 25 states. Before partnering with YLD, the foundation had programs in seven states.

In addition, YLD is planning local will-drafting programs on April 19, at its spring conference in Washington, D.C., and on Aug. 9 at the ABA Annual Meeting in New York.

John Karns, assistant chief of the Beverly Hills Fire Department, said the pro bono assistance fills an urgent need for many in his department, who he said sometimes procrastinate on getting their legal affairs in order.

“I can’t tell you how much we appreciate this,” Karns said. “It makes us stop and think, how are we going to take care of our loved ones. It’s a wonderful, wonderful service.”

To learn more about Wills for Heroes, visit www.abanet.org/yld/wills/home.html, or www.willsforheroes.org.



Beverly Hills Mayor Jimmy Delshad presents a "Wills for Heroes Foundation Day" proclamation to Marc Sallus, president of the Beverly Hills Bar Association. Justin Goldstein, YLD chair, is at far right. Wills for Heroes founders Anthony Hayes and Jeffrey Jacobson kneel in front.