



# Bankruptcy Court Liaison Committee Newsletter

Winter 2015

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## Bankruptcy Help Desk Update Funding Cuts, Volunteers Needed

The Bankruptcy Help Desk is funded primarily by the Chicago Bar Foundation and managed by LAF. Historically, the Help Desk was open Monday through Friday from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. However, in July funding to the Help Desk was reduced significantly forcing the help desk to close its doors two days each week. With the help of dedicated volunteers and oversight by LAF attorneys, the desk is currently staffed Monday, Wednesday and Friday with two attorneys. The Help Desk is also closed for court holidays.

In order to bring the Help Desk back to serving debtors and the Court on a full time basis, LAF is looking for volunteers who have at least one year of consumer or business bankruptcy experience and can volunteer at least one shift every two months. Depending on volunteer availability LAF will make every attempt to schedule two attorneys each day, one with more bankruptcy experience. In addition, you will have access to a knowledgeable attorney by telephone who will be able to assist you with any questions you may have.

In December there was a training session for interested volunteers. Thank you to those who were able to participate in the training. We had a wonderful turnout of judges and practitioners alike from solo firms to large law firms. If you were not able to attend but are still interested in volunteering, it is not too late! Those interested in volunteering can view the training video and schedule a tour of the help desk.

The video is available for review online at <http://tinyurl.com/BKhelpdeskvid>.

This is a great opportunity to be a part of a wonderful group of individuals and give back to the community while helping your fellow practitioners and the court. If you are interested please contact David Yen at [dyen@lafchicago.org](mailto:dyen@lafchicago.org).

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## THANK YOU! to all Attorneys serving on the Volunteer Attorney Panel

As we begin a new year, the Bankruptcy Liaison Committee would like to extend our thanks and gratitude to the attorneys that serve on the Volunteer Attorney Panel.

The Volunteer Attorney Panel is administered by the Bankruptcy Court with support from the Bankruptcy Liaison Committee and the Chicago Bar Association Bankruptcy and Reorganization Committee. The volunteer attorneys represent indigent parties in adversary proceedings and contested matters on a pro bono basis.

### *Committee Members*

Kimberly Bacher  
Sarah Baker  
Erich Buck  
Frank Buckley  
Monette Cope  
Ryan Dahl  
Nathan Delman  
Thomas Fawkes  
Phillip Groben  
John Guzzardo  
Cari Kauffman  
Jeffrey Paulsen  
KC Swanson  
Brandon White  
Shamira Youkhaneh  
Chief Judge Bruce W. Black  
Judge Janet S. Baer  
Judge Donald R. Cassling  
Judge Thomas M. Lynch

The bankruptcy judges identify matters in which a party, often a debtor in a consumer case, may qualify for the program and would benefit from representation by a volunteer attorney. The bankruptcy judges refer these matters to the clerk of court, who then contacts panel members to obtain representation. Because the program is voluntary, a panel member may decline a request for representation for any reason.

Volunteer attorneys use their specialized bankruptcy knowledge to serve clients who might not otherwise obtain representation in complicated bankruptcy matters. In light of the recent reduction in services offered by the Bankruptcy Assistance Desk, the time and effort contributed by the volunteer attorneys is particularly critical at the present moment.

If you are interested in serving on the Volunteer Attorney Panel in 2015, please visit the Bankruptcy Court's homepage and click on the Volunteer Attorney Panel link for additional information.

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## NCBJ Visited Chicago



The Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Bankruptcy Judges took place this year in Chicago for the first time since 2002. The Bankruptcy Liaison Committee along with Freeborn & Peters LLP kicked off the Annual Meeting with a fantastic Architectural Boat Tour along the Chicago River on the evening of Wednesday, October 8. The tour was attended by approximately 80 Bankruptcy Judges and 125 Bankruptcy Professionals from around the country, including many present and former members of the Liaison Committee.

Chief Judge Bruce Black and Nathan Delman, the current president of the Liaison Committee, welcomed guests to Chicago on behalf of the Committee. Richard S. Lauter, Partner at Freeborn & Peters LLP and Chair of its Bankruptcy and Financial Restructuring Practice Group introduced the special guest tour guide – Geoffrey Baer, the Emmy winning executive producer at WTTW Chicago. Geoffrey is a prolific author and the host of the PBS architecture series “Ten Buildings that Changed America” and dozens of additional programs about Chicago architecture and history on WTTW Channel 11. Having Geoffrey conduct the Architecture Tour provided a truly one of a kind evening for all in attendance. Guests were captivated by Geoffrey’s masterful storytelling, conversational style, and contagious enthusiasm. The evening weather cooperated as it was a clear, pleasant fall night in Chicago, allowing guests to easily observe the historic architectural landmarks around Chicago. The boat was beautiful, the food and drink were outstanding, and the attendees were riveted to their seats as Geoffrey delighted them with stories about the architectural history of the city. A huge thanks to Freeborn & Peters LLP for sponsoring this great event with the Liaison Committee.



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## ABI Chicago Consumer Conference

The American Bankruptcy Institute held its annual Chicago Consumer Conference on November 11. It was a day full of information including friendly debates on hot topics in consumer bankruptcy practice, breakout sessions for Chapter 7 issues, Chapter 13 issues, and Creditor representation issues, as well as a mock evidentiary hearing put on by some of our respected judges. There was a great turnout from the bench and bar. Be sure to keep your eyes out for next year's conference and join many members of the Committee as well as our bankruptcy community at this great event!

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## Practitioner Survey Coming Spring/Summer 2015

A couple years ago, a comprehensive survey was distributed amongst the practitioners in the Bankruptcy Court for the Northern District of Illinois. It resulted in informative feedback and led to important changes in the bankruptcy practice, affecting consumer and commercial cases as well as courtroom procedures and requirements. It is now time to again take the pulse of the local practice and see what we can do to continue improving the bankruptcy practice in the Northern District of Illinois by increasing efficiency and addressing the ever changing technological advances of our society. It is our hope to have the survey distributed in late spring or early summer of this year. Please keep your eyes open for it and take a few moments to give your input on the day to day practice and ways in which it can be improved. Thank you in advance for your assistance with this important task and please direct any questions you may have to the Bankruptcy Liaison Committee at [bankruptcyliaisoncommittee@gmail.com](mailto:bankruptcyliaisoncommittee@gmail.com) or by contacting a member of the Committee directly.

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## Bankruptcy Help Desk Expands to Western Division

Beginning December 8, 2014, the bankruptcy bar of the Western Division will operate a Bankruptcy Help Desk to assist *pro se* debtors for Chapter 7 cases.

Every year, approximately 200 to 270 bankruptcy petitions are filed by *pro se* debtors in the Western Division. Most of these cases seek relief under Chapter 7. Not surprisingly, many of these cases are troubled from the outset due to the petitioners' lack of knowledge about bankruptcy basics.

Growing out of a discussion at the bankruptcy Town Hall Meeting held at the court in late 2013 an ad hoc committee of concerned members of the bar, representatives of Prairie State Legal Services and Northern Illinois University School of Law have been meeting with the Court and the Clerk of the Court to examine problems encountered by *pro se* filers and possible solutions. This effort in turn led to a series of planning meetings to devise and implement a volunteer program. Along the way our merry band received incredible encouragement and assistance from the District Court and members of the Eastern Division's Pro Bono Committee and Help Desk staff, to name just a few of many supporters.

The stars must have been in alignment for we are now pleased to announce that more than a dozen volunteer attorneys have completed their orientation and are ready to begin meeting with debtors next month in a suite of rooms located in the Stanley J. Roszkowski Federal Courthouse (photos below). Supporting our attorneys is an initial “class” of nineteen volunteer paralegals who have completed the training program provided by the Bankruptcy Clerk. In addition, we look forward to a group of “Rule 711” law students from NIU joining the Help Desk early next year.



Initially, the program will serve *pro se* debtors who contemplate or have filed petitions for relief under Chapter 7 in the Western Division. Two volunteer attorneys and an equal number of paralegals/law students will staff the Help Desk one day each week. The service will be provided by appointment only, and Prairie State Legal Services, with the assistance of the Bankruptcy Clerk, will coordinate scheduling and provide information. The program, the first of its kind in the Western Division, would not be possible without support of our volunteers, Prairie State, NIU, Rockford Career College, the District Court and its Clerk, and our own Clerk and his staff. Thank you all!

We are very excited about this initiative and warmly encourage you to consider volunteering a couple of hours of your time and skills a few times a year to the Help Desk.

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## Liaison Committee Announces the Inaugural Judge John D. Schwartz Memorial Law School Writing Competition

The Bankruptcy Liaison Committee for the Northern District of Illinois will be sponsoring the inaugural Judge John D. Schwartz Memorial Law Student Writing Competition for law school students. Students currently enrolled at area law schools, including the University of Illinois, Loyola, Northern Illinois, Northwestern, DePaul, IIT-Kent, University of Chicago, John Marshall and Southern Illinois are eligible to participate by submitting papers on any issue of bankruptcy law or procedure, with particular emphasis on matters arising in federal courts in the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit. This competition will honor Judge Schwartz’s well-recognized commitment to the development and integrity of insolvency and restructuring practice, and will provide law students a unique

opportunity to engage on cutting edge topics with both sitting judges and practitioners alike.

Law students are encouraged to submit papers of five thousand words or less not later than April 15, 2015, with students submitting the top three papers to receive cash prizes of \$2,000 (First Place), \$1,000 (Second Place), and \$500 (Third Place). Submissions will be evaluated by a blue ribbon panel of judges, lawyers and professors. Winners will be announced at an inaugural reception to be held this Spring, where all students who submit a paper for consideration will be invited to network with judges and members of the bankruptcy bar of the Northern District of Illinois.

Francis X. Buckley Jr., a partner at Thomson Coburn LLP and member of the Liaison Committee working group that developed the writing competition said "Our goal is to further interest in the area of bankruptcy and restructuring for future generations of lawyers. This writing competition honors the memory of Judge Schwartz and the scholarly approach he took in the administration of bankruptcy cases before him. Judge Schwartz was a positive influence to the bench and bar during his long and distinguished tenure as a bankruptcy judge in the Northern District of Illinois. He strongly believed that the quality of bankruptcy practice was enhanced through scholarship and collegiality, and it is fitting that we will provide participating students –future lawyers and colleagues—the opportunity to network with the judges and attorneys in this district, and vice versa."

A website is being created to facilitate the submission of papers and provide additional details about the Competition, but any interested parties should feel free to contact Frank Buckley or any member of the Liaison Committee with questions at any time. We look forward to a robust participation in what should be a great tradition for many years to come.

#### Contact the Committee

<http://www.ilnb.uscourts.gov/bankruptcy-court-liaison-committee>

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