

# William E. McKnight AWARD

## MacKnight, Stiller honored with volunteer service award

By JIM BARG

For both David MacKnight and Sharon Stiller, giving back to the community means using their skills to help those less fortunate.

This history of community advocacy is why they're both being honored with the Volunteer Legal Services Project (VLSP) William C. McKnight Volunteer Service Award.

William C. McKnight was Nixon Peabody LLP's first African-American partner, and was a fixture on the VLSP board before his death in 1985.

David MacKnight has been aiding VLSP for so long he can't remember how he first became involved with the organization.

"My best guess is that I learned that VLSP existed, then volunteered as a reasonable method of meeting pro bono obligations," said MacKnight, a commercial litigation attorney with Lacy Katzen LLP.

His law expertise dates back to his days as an Air Force legal officer. These days he's happy to utilize his skillset to help veterans.

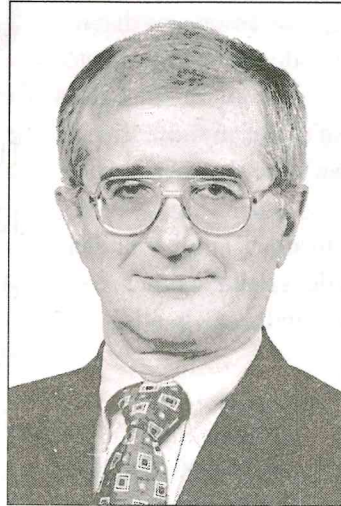
"There is a shortage of attorneys in the area with any experience in military administrative and criminal law and fewer still willing to use that experience. Matters come my way as a result," he says.

MacKnight's specialty is bankruptcy services, and he's happy to help those "that want to live in the world of the law, not spend their time dodging creditors."

On top of his legal work, he volunteers for a debt management advice and consultation clinic held by VLSP throughout the year.

No matter whether he's helping veterans or aiding civilians, he understands his responsibility to help others as an attorney.

"Pro bono service is a part of the profession of an attorney and counselor at law.



DAVID MACKNIGHT



SHARON STILLER

It comes with the territory," said MacKnight.

Sharon Stiller's interest in law started at the age of eight, she says, and it's led her down the path of becoming a partner at Abrams Fensterman while doing pro bono work for VLSP.

An employment law attorney, Stiller compares her VLSP work to giving blood every two months, living up to what she calls "my commitment to others."

"VLSP performs a critical service for our community," Stiller said. "It is the best of humanity and the best of our legal community."

When asked for examples of VLSP casework, she tells the story of a woman who suffered emotional and physical abuse at the hands of her husband. The woman was in such distress Stiller made a house call instead of seeing her in the office.

"The day of her divorce proceedings she was finally able to summon up enough strength to come to court," Stiller said.

She added: "I have never seen a wider smile than when she obtained the divorce that she did not think she would be able to get."

Outside of the office, she helped create VLSP's annual Art of Lawyering fundraiser.

"My two loves are art and the law. There are many talented lawyers who are also talented artists. We were brainstorming about raising money for VLSP and agreed that it would be a great opportunity to showcase talent while helping VLSP."

Stiller remains grateful for the support given by her partners at Abrams Fensterman.

"I am proud of my firm for giving me the freedom to devote my services to this program and I am proud of our legal community for making support of VLSP a priority."

*Jim Barg is a Rochester-area freelance writer.*