

LAWYERS JOURNAL

HSBD honors Paul Titus with Drum Major for Justice Award

By Zandy Dudiak

Since he began practicing law in the 1960s, Paul H. Titus has used his legal talents to serve Pittsburgh's minority community.

In his early days, he was active with the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, the NEED scholarship program and community organizations in the North Side and Hill District. Now, his efforts are focused on acquainting seventh- and eighth-grade students at a Catholic school in Wilkesburg with the legal process and government.

Titus, an ACBA member, has found personal reward in using his education and discipline to serve people. In his words, that's "part of being a lawyer, really."

His focus on service within Pittsburgh's minority community has not gone unnoticed.

Titus has been selected as the recipient of this year's "Drum Major for Justice Award," presented by the ACBA's Homer S. Brown Division to recognize individuals and organizations for their contributions in perpetuating the convictions of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to "make justice, equality and opportunity a reality for all people."

The name of the award originates from one of King's final sermons about a eulogy that might be given in the event of his death. King said, "If you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice. Say that I was a drum major for peace. I was a drum major for righteousness."

Titus, counsel at Schnader Harrison Segal & Lewis LLP, will be honored by the HSBD at the 19th annual Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King Jr. Prayer Breakfast and Program, held on Martin Luther King Day to commemorate King's life and his contributions to changes in the law and social justice.

As best as HSBD officials can determine, Titus is the first white man or woman to receive the award.

"To take it away from color for a second, it goes to people who are deserving of the award," according to Ron Jones, HSBD chair. "It's important to have people of all colors come together – all nationalities and races – to put forth the convictions of Dr. King, particularly during this time.



Paul H. Titus

I believe Mr. Titus, through working with schools, has encompassed that."

Titus credits his lifelong dedication to volunteering to his parents, who were role models because they were always helping others. He said his firm also has a strong tradition of public service.

According to Titus, his pro bono work has included a number of time-consuming death-penalty cases, some immigration cases and working as counsel for the Metropolitan Tenants Organization and Neighborhood Housing Council in Manchester. But much of his attention for the last two decades has been focused on working with school students.

"Paul has done extraordinary community work with the Diocese of Pittsburgh to ensure that diverse students attending predominately African-American

Catholic schools have an opportunity to gain hands-on experience in the legal field," said Tracey McCants Lewis, emcee for the prayer breakfast, who nominated Titus for the award.

After his pastor at what is now Holy Rosary Parish in Homewood asked if he could volunteer with the church's school, Titus said he decided to work with seventh- and eighth-grade students by helping them prepare for a mock trial. That effort has continued for 20 years and has carried over to Sister Thea Bowman Catholic Academy in Wilkesburg, which merged with Holy Rosary Parish in 2010.

"I see the work that Paul does with this project," Lewis said. "Paul has solicited assistance from many attorneys who serve as trial coaches and mentors to the students ... especially people of color. He tries to get attorneys who look similar to the students."

The mock trial is held before actual judges, who have included Livingstone Johnson, Dwayne Woodruff and Kim Berkeley Clark. Afterward, Titus hosts the students for lunch at his firm. Each spring, he lectures the students about the U.S. Constitution, government and civil rights.

"He takes them through some major civil rights proceedings," said Mary Beth Jaquay, the teacher who has worked with Titus at the school for the last four years.

Jaquay said the experience is important for many of the students, whose lives are touched by the legal system in

some way. For mock trial, they dress professionally, meet people who work in the legal system and appreciate the respect they get as individuals.

“It kind of helps balance the entire thing,” she explained. “For our kids, it’s been a rite of passage.”

For many of his years involved in the project with Holy Rosary and Sister Thea Bowman schools, Titus’ effort culminated in a field trip to Washington, D.C., during which students got the chance to visit the U.S. Supreme Court, the Senate, House of Representatives and other historical and educational sites in the capital. About 10 years ago, the outing switched to a day trip to Harrisburg, where they meet someone from state Superior Court and tour the state capitol.

Titus takes the students to hear arguments before three-judge panels for the Third Circuit Court of Appeals when it hears cases in Pittsburgh during May.

“(U.S. Circuit) Judge Thomas Hardiman invites us to his chambers, and we have lunch with him and his law clerks,” Titus added.

Two students who participated in the program have gone on to pursue law careers. One, who attended Duquesne University, is now a first-year student at Howard University School of Law. The other, who attended Tufts University and then law school at Stanford University, is particularly memorable to Titus.

When the second student went with Titus and his fellow students to hear arguments before the Third Circuit Court, they sat in on an insurance coverage case argued before Judge Midge Rendell by two poorly prepared male attorneys. The next case was a criminal appeal argued by two women attorneys before the female judge.

“It was a really grueling half hour,” Titus recalled.

At the conclusion, the student said, “Mr. Titus, are women always better lawyers?”

Using tact, Titus answered, “Not always. But often.” ■