

Comm. Dardis will receive award for developing innovative programs

Hon. Frederic Dardis, a commissioner assigned to the Family Law Bench at Pima County Superior Court, has been named the winner of the 2009 recipient of the Foundation for Justice Award from Arizona Foundation for Legal Services and Education.

The award will be given June 19 in conjunction with the annual convention for the State Bar of Arizona at Westin La Paloma in Tucson.



Hon. Frederic Dardis

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The honor accorded to Comm. Dardis is "awarded to the attorney who has devoted expertise and time to changing the justice system to promote access and opportunity for those most vulnerable."

Previous honorees

Previous recipients of the award include: Keith Perkins, founder of the Never Again Foundation; the Hon. Colin Campbell, Maricopa County Superior Court; and the Hon. Scott Bales, an associate justice of the Arizona Supreme Court.

According to the award citation, Comm. Dardis has devoted his career to assuring that the courts are available to all who need them. Immediately after his 1999 swearing in, Comm. Dardis began work on many innovative pro bono initiatives that have since become permanent fixtures in our legal community. The initiatives link vital partners including the court, the law school, the Volunteer Lawyers Program (VLP), and organizations that have provided financial support.

Child Support Project

The first of these initiatives, the Child Support Project, was launched in 2001. Through the project, volunteer attorneys supervise law students as they meet with unrepresented litigants prior to final divorce hearings in superior court. Comm. Dardis and the Family Law Bench volunteered their time to train law students participating in the Child Support Project.

Guardianship of Minor Project

After Comm. Dardis was assigned to the Probate Bench in 2005 he launched the Guardianship of Minor Project. Under the supervision of a volunteer attorney, students meet with unrepresented clients at their guardianship hearings and offered their recommendations to court as to whether the client should be awarded a guardianship.

In addition to his tangible contributions in the fields of pro bono and access to the courts, the award citation praises Comm. Dardis for providing "strength, wisdom,

and support to the VLP staff on a daily basis. These immeasurable gifts are treasured assets and the secret to the program's suc-

cess."

Deserved honor

Hon. Sarah Simmons, presiding judge of the Family Law Bench, said the Foundation for Justice Award is a well-deserved honor. "Comm. Dardis, more than anyone I know, has devoted his career to assuring that the courts are available to all who need them," she said. "His work and his volunteer efforts in this cause are exemplary."

Team effort

The announcement of the Foundation for Justice Award came as a total surprise to Comm. Dardis. "I was totally shocked when I heard about it," he said.

Comm. Dardis was quick to point out that the award should be shared with his colleagues on the bench at superior court. "There have been a lot of other judges who have worked together to get this award so it belongs to the family law and the probate benches," he suggested. "It's just not me, but all of the judges have been really active in getting students involved in working with us."

Comm. Dardis emphasized that it's easy to think of an idea but it is hard to implement it. "Those are the people who should be getting the award," he said. "The initial child support program was born out of a need to figure out how we can do our job our job quicker and better. Back when defaults were held at 1:30 p.m. in the old board of supervisors hearing room there were 40 people at a time and the judges had to do the paperwork."

Significant increases

Comm. Dardis decided that it was "the perfect time and the perfect opportunity" to provide law students with on-the-job training assisting people who need the help. "One benefit noted by the Volunteer Lawyers Program is that the amount of child support being calculated then as opposed to now has shown a significant increase," he pointed out.