

Montgomery first responders receive free legal services

Lori Nickel

Staff Writer

America's first responders put their lives on the line for those in need. Out of appreciation for the sacrifices first responders make, the Minnesota State Bar Association is offering a free program for them called Wills for Heroes.

On Monday, Aug. 20, attorneys and staff from the Minneapolis area visited City Hall in Montgomery to provide police, fire and ambulance personnel with free estate planning services, which included wills, health care directives and financial powers of attorney to all Montgomery first responders and their spouses. The need for this planning was brought to light after the September 11 tragedy.

Andrea Bischoff, a resident of Lanesburgh Township and part of the volunteer legal staff, said that after September 11, it was realized that 85 percent of firefighters do not have wills in place. She said Minnesota is the sixth state to offer this free service to first responders. The service is valued at over \$1,000 per plan.

Bischoff explained that the program is funded through donations, and the attorneys and staff donate their time and services for the program.

"People come from all over to volunteer their time," Bischoff said. "It's all pro bono. We get the satisfaction of helping people who risk their lives on a daily basis. That's our benefit."

The program started in June, 2007 and Bischoff said they have 79 more requests from various police, fire, and ambulance precincts for the free services.



Lori Nickel Photo

Montgomery Fire fighter and ambulance member Joel More (front, left) with wife Sharon (right), a member of ambulance services and police reserves, took part in the Wills for Heroes program offered at City Hall on Monday, Aug. 20. They were assisted by legal staff (back, from left) Jennifer Raykowski, Andrea Bischoff and Gary Zaugg.

The group of attorneys and staff who donated their legal expertise in Montgomery were Executive Director of the MN State Bar Association Tim Groshens, Attorneys Jennifer Anderson, Susan Link, Jennifer Raykowski, Gary Zaugg, Wes Kiplinger, and Matt Shea, and legal staff Elizabeth Bolt, Joy Wallace, Deb Dix, and Andrea Bischoff.

Joel and Sharon More were among the several first responders who received legal services Monday evening. Joel has served 13 years with the Montgomery Fire Department and ambulance services, while Sharon has been an ambulance services member for 13 years and is in the police reserves.

"It's wonderful what they're

doing. We're fortunate they came right here at our convenience," Sharon said. "A will is something you give thought to or have in the back of your mind, but you get so busy helping others, it takes second place."

Bischoff said their free legal services are in high demand. A group of legal volunteers travel to precincts on the first and third Mondays of every month, and on occasion, Saturdays.

"We're booked through June of 2008," Bischoff commented.

For more information on Wills for Heroes, click the link on the Minnesota Bar Association website at www.mnbar.org.