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Federal court, bar group honor pro bono work

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American Bar Association President Karen J. Mathis says a common theme marks the work of lawyers across the country.

Members of the legal profession are dedicated to serving others, according to Mathis.

"It's natural, I guess, to give our utmost service to our paying clients," Mathis said Friday in Chicago. "But our proud profession is committed to representing the millions of low-income Americans who desperately need our services but cannot pay for them."

Mathis was the keynote speaker at a ceremony recognizing attorneys for representing indigent clients in civil matters free of charge before the Chicago-based federal trial courts or working to advance the public interest.

The Awards for Excellence in Pro Bono and Public Interest Service are sponsored by the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois and the Chicago chapter of the Federal Bar Association.

Convening the ceremony at the Dirksen Federal Courthouse were Chief U.S. District Judge James F. Holderman and Joel R. Skinner, president of the FBA's Chicago chapter.

Skinner said lawyers who practice in the Northern District stand out from their colleagues around the country when it comes to serving those in need of representation in civil matters.

Patrick A. Clisham of Shaw, Gussis, Fishman, Glantz, Wolfson & Towbin LLC. and Joseph U. Schorer of Kirkland & Ellis LLP were presented with the Special Recognition Award for Excellence in Public Interest Legal Education.

U.S. Bankruptcy Judge A. Benjamin Goldgar said the pair's work for the past two years as the coordinators of the Credit Abuse Resistance Education program showed that not all public service work takes place in the courtroom.

Bankruptcy lawyers and judges participating in the C.A.R.E. program go into high schools and colleges to warn students about the dangers of easy credit and educate them about the bankruptcy system.