Last year, the Law Student Division of the American Bar Association honored the students of the University of Chicago Law School for their community and public service work by recognizing the Law School as the Public Interest Law School of the Year. The award lauded the nearly 94,000 hours the students donated last year to various public service activities and their efforts to bring community activism to the forefront at the Law School.

To fully appreciate the award, it is important to put it in the proper perspective. Unlike other institutions, the Law School does not require pro bono hours from its second- or third-year students as a prerequisite for graduation. Yet nearly half the students at the Law School make the effort to set aside a certain number of hours each week to active community involvement. As Dean of Student Affairs Ellen M. Cosgrove recently noted: "Most people feel incredibly fortunate to be at the University of Chicago Law School. There is a sense that one should give something back to the community. The students participate in these projects because they chose to participate, not because they are fulfilling a requirement. That spirit deserves recognition."

It is a spirit first kindled in 1957 with the founding of the Mandel Legal Aid Clinic. From the beginning, the Clinic was never short of students eager to participate in legal aid. The first year, under the chairmanship of A. Conrad Olson '58, the Clinic's Student Committee welcomed the interest of forty-seven volunteers. Throughout the years, that interest never waned; in fact, it grew so that beginning in the early 1970s Clinic participants had to be chosen by lottery for the limited number of positions.

In the early 1980s student involvement at the Law School began to grow at a rapid pace.
Since that time, seven separate student public interest organizations were founded. Three are associated with established national programs (Street Law, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance, and Work-A-Day) while the others are Chicago-born (Neighbors, Women's Clemency Project, Immigration and Refugee Law Project, and the Charity Auction). The common thread they share is that they were all initiated by students who saw needs they believed should be addressed.

In the pages that follow, we focus on these groups. The editor invites readers to look forward to a future issue of the Law School Record in which the Mandel Legal Aid Clinic, its impact on the community it serves, and the legal world will be profiled. For now, here are seven student-directed groups that earned the respect of the American Bar Association, the Law School, and the communities they serve.

**Street Law**

Street Law is the oldest of the student service organizations currently active at the Law School. Modeled after a successful program developed at the Georgetown Law Center, Street Law is a national program that forms a partnership between law schools and area public schools to expose high school students to the fundamentals of the law. Law school students volunteer to act as supplemental teachers in high school American History or American Government classes. They spend one hour each week with students. The program, available as an elective class to junior- and senior-age students, serves as an introduction to the purpose and effects of law in everyday life. The students utilize their own topics and imaginations to develop activities using group discussions, debates on current legal issues, and mock trials.

Street Law was introduced to the Law School in 1980 by Howard Heitner '82 who was the president of the Law Students' Association and had heard of the program's success in other schools. "I knew it would be interesting for us at the Law School," Heitner says today. "I wrote away to the Street Law Foundation, received their material, and started the program right up."

Heitner recalls that during the first year the program drew only two volunteers, Henry Schmeltzer '82 and Daniel Levin '81. However, the popularity grew steadily over the next few years. Today, over sixty law students teach approximately 350 students in twelve high school classes. Many of the students are first-year students. All the current board members participated in the program during their first year, including this year's co-ordinator Jennifer Canell '97. Ms. Canell believes the reason that law students return to the program every year is that it is rewarding to both the high school students and the law school volunteers.

"The kids are filled with ideas," Canell says. "You learn so much from them. In fact, we feel the entire experience is as good or better for the Street Law teachers as it is for the high school students.

"The best part of the program is not necessarily the actual subject matter but the ability to talk with students in a better student to teacher ratio than their teachers are allowed. It's really great to see the students have a conversation on an current issue because, in our small groups, they can really listen to each other. Just to have inner city students say 'I never met a lawyer before, do you think I could be that?' is so wonderful. You can just see how engaged they were."

**Henry C. Schmeltzer '82**

**Participant, Street Law (1980)**

I became involved with the Street Law program in order to learn what it was like to teach. I was particularly interested in working with students from entirely different backgrounds. I had attended a private boys' high school outside Washington, D.C., where most of the students were from privileged backgrounds. The high school at which I taught Street Law was located in a working class neighborhood, and the students generally had very different goals and aspirations from those of my high school classmates.

I had not taught prior to my work with the Street Law program and decided to use a modified Socratic method of teaching. Rather than simply repeating the contents of the text, I asked the students to think about situations and present their views. Some of the students appreciated the fact that their thoughts were being considered while others were irritated at being bothered so early in the morning. By the end of the semester, most of the student were participating enthusiastically.

One student in particular stood out from the others. A senior in high school, she had received consistently high grades but had never considered college because no one in her family had attended before her. We discussed at some length college life and her fears that she would not be able to handle the pressures involved. She was extremely shy, but nonetheless, against her parents' preferences, applied to and was accepted by DePaul University. She graduated four years later and became a legal assistant.

Street Law was one of the highlights of my years at the Law School.

**The Women's Clemency Project**

The Women's Clemency Project offers law students an opportunity to study legal
problems associated with domestic violence. The project is presented to interested second- and third-year student in two components. First, students enrolled in the Domestic Violence seminar offered by Professor Mary Becker '80 study the causes of domestic violence, the legal system's response to the problem, and the controversy over the admissibility of evidence about the "battered woman syndrome" in defense of women who kill their abusers. Concurrently, students participate in an ongoing statewide project that oversees the filing of clemency petitions in domestic violence cases. Students become members of teams preparing and filing petitions of clemency on behalf of a woman currently serving a prison sentence for killing or injuring her abuser. Each team consists of two students and an attorney who is either one of the seminar instructors or an attorney participating on a pro bono basis.

The program began in the spring of 1993 when students approached Professor Becker to discuss their interest in work involving women-oriented issues. "At one time, the Mandel Clinic did not do any work involving violence against women," Professor Becker says. "Their major projects focused on areas that didn't directly involve issues connected with women. So, a few students approached me to see what could be done in this area. We decided to hold a strategy session to discuss possible projects."

That strategy session not only included students and faculty from the Mandel Clinic but practicing attorneys involved in individual clemency petitions who wished to implement a statewide project dealing with large numbers of petitions. Thus, the Women's Clemency Project was born.

From the beginning, the Project has focused on cases Professor Becker points with pride at the success the program has achieved on many levels. First, awareness in women-oriented legal issues, and domestic violence in particular, has grown among area law schools. Second, this interest is not restricted to female students alone, as each year a steady number of men have actively participated in the project.

Most importantly, the Clemency Project has seen success in its primary goal. A little over a year after that first meeting, Professor Becker and her students delivered to Illinois Governor Jim Edgar twelve clemency petitions they had assisted in drafting. Four of the women represented by the Project eventually were granted clemency.

The Project's work continues. Last year, among the eighteen petitions filed were twelve focusing on the cases the governor had denied clemency the year before. This year, Project members hope to expand the focus to other areas of women's legal affairs, possibly including efforts to improve the living conditions in Illinois women's prisons. In this endeavor, as in all the others, Project members serve as the "voice for these women" and tell their stories.

A very important aspect of the Clemency Project was that the program as a whole worked with the media to get a lot of public attention and support for these women and for what we were attempting to accomplish. That helped each case tremendously. It was interesting for the students to be involved in a process where the outside world was looking in on the situation. There was a great deal of pressure on us because a woman's life and what she would be doing with that life for the next five to fifteen years were at stake. We all felt so strongly about the cause and that we were part of something that acted as a voice for women. It was important, regardless of who was granted clemency, that we acted as their voice and had their stories told. Whether or not they were released in the end, at least someone heard their story.

I was able to handle my case throughout the entire process; from the very beginning of the petition process to the moment my client was released from prison. I was able to see the power that you have with the law and what you can do to make a difference. It still feels like the best thing that I've ever done for anyone. Definitely, this project is the high point in my life thus far.

I still keep in touch with my client. Her life is going well. She is doing many positive things. She is starting a new life and is in counseling to deal with the abuse from the past. To hear someone sounding so strong and positive, after what she lived through, is wonderful. She sent me a Christmas card last year and she sounded so positive—so optimistic and upbeat. It's a really great feeling. I'll never forget it.
THE CHARITY AUCTION

Would you spend $80 to walk Professor Cass Sunstein's dog? Or perhaps $260 to watch movies at the home of Dean Baird? That is what some bidders eagerly paid for these and eighty other items offered on January 26 during the fifth annual Law School Charity Auction.

Over the years, the Auction—under the steady gavel of Professor Richard Epstein—has successfully raised almost $70,000 to assist local nonprofit service organizations. Despite its short history, the Charity Auction, spearheaded by the Law Students Association, has become one of the most eagerly anticipated events of the academic year, involving not only the student body, but faculty members, administrators and staff, as well as outside businesses and law firms.

Begun in 1992, the Auction was the brainchild of Lauren Elliot '93. "The underlying purpose to the Charity Auction was to give something back to the neighborhood," recalls Elliot. "I brought two ideas together: the opportunity to work with the community by raising funds for a local organization and the fun of doing it at the same time."

Initial concerns over the success of the auction were swept away as a great outpouring of donated material arrived in the last few days before the event. Elliot and her crew were amazed to find that instead of the few thousand they secretly hoped to raise, the evening ended with a final tally of over $9,000.

"We really did not expect there would be such competitiveness between the students bidding on particular items. Someone actually paid money for an old chair Professor Helmholz donated. It astonished me that it wound up to be such a hot item." (Professor Richard Helmholz himself agrees. "I was absolutely dumbfounded that anyone would pay so much for that old high-back chair; perhaps not as dumbfounded as I am that someone would pay as much as they do for taking care of Cass Sunstein's dog, but dumbfounded none-the-less."

Much of the success of the Auction is credited to Professor Richard Epstein, the auctioneer since the beginning. "He's the best," says Elliot. He was very instrumental in making it a success, and he still is. Of course, afterward he's always exhausted; we would have to feed him candy bars to keep that sugar level high. But he loved it."

This year, marshaled by Marta Lowe '96, the Charity Auction raised $15,875 to benefit the Woodlawn Organization (TWO), a local public service group serving Chicago's south side. TWO provides a multitude of services from building low rent non-profit housing for families at risk to teaching early childhood development classes for area youth.

MARTA LOWE '96

The charity auction is one of the few events during the year when the entire Law School gets together, and it never fails to entertain. Organizing it was a pleasure. Most donors are happy to give and people are surprisingly eager to part with their money for a good cause.

The auction is such an anticipated event mostly because of Professor Epstein, but also because we offer items that people wouldn't have access to normally. For example, there is the baseball game with Professor Strauss. It sells for several hundred dollars every year because he is so popular and it's something that you can't do on a regular basis. It is a way for students who really like him to express their appreciation. And, yes, Professor Sunstein agreed to loan out "Bear, the wonder dog" (his words, not mine) for the afternoon.

As a first year student, I saw the Auction from the spectator's perspective and I had a blast. It's a great way to learn about the Law School community. As a second year, I worked as one of the helpers. From that advantage, you begin to get more of a feel for the service aspect. This year as coordinator was incredibly fulfilling for me. I really got to know the Law School faculty and students and the law firms in Chicago who are willing to donate their time and services. That's a pretty incredible experience.
What's particularly great about this program is that it is extremely one-on-one. People literally lay their lives before you. It's very personal. I've had clients come in ashamed because they've become unemployed in the last year. That's a huge tax change. They go from W-2s to unemployment benefits. So on top of feeling ashamed they are scared because they don't know how to file their tax forms. It's a relief to them that, in the midst of their economic chaos, someone is there to lend a hand.

It is an intense three weeks but, since it occurs so early in the spring quarter, it comes at the exact point law students are able to give the time. There are so many people here who recognize that we are tied to the community and want to have an impact on it.

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program (VITA) is a nation-wide effort overseen by the Internal Revenue Service and sponsored in part by the American Bar Association's Law Student Division. VITA volunteers prepare income tax returns for those who cannot afford commercial tax preparation assistance and people with special needs, including the disabled, non-English speakers, senior citizens, and homebound taxpayers. Currently celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary, the program offers free tax advice at over 9,000 sites across the nation. The Law School began its involvement with the program in 1982. This year, over twenty Law School students are actively involved.

Participants are not professional tax preparers, stresses Priya Cherian '96, co-ordinator of VITA program at the Law School this year, "It is not necessary to have an accounting background. But everyone at the Law School is good at reading directions and indexing. These may seem like simple skills but, in the face of general disempowerment our clients feel, they are very important skills."

Cherian points out that a large majority of clients are scared of filing tax forms. In addition, some clients are illiterate. "We are there for the elderly with Social Security benefits, the unemployed, people who do not have much means at all. They know that we are there in good faith and our clients feel extremely confident because they perceive that, as attorneys, we know what we are doing. I know the volunteers take it very seriously. It's good training and a great way to contribute to the community."

Work-A-Day

Like Street Law and VITA, Work-A-Day is a national program which Law School students participate. The program was founded four years ago at the University of Illinois Law School to encourage law students to set aside one day a year to reach out to their communities and begin a career-long affiliation with pro bono work. This year, under the co-ordination of the American Bar Association's Law Student Division, the Law School was one of over fifty schools nation-wide participating in the event.

"The Year of the Child," was the theme this year and over eighty Law School students participated, according to Amy Friedlander '96, the co-ordinator of the Law School's program. "We doubled the number of volunteers from last year. Every
year the participation has increased from the previous year. Work-A-Day is the perfect program for people who feel they don't have the time to make a long term commitment to a service project. Half of our volunteers don't have obligations to community service programs.

In keeping with the spirit of this year's theme, volunteers focused their efforts on nine programs and organizations dealing with children's needs. Teams were dispatched to two Ronald McDonald Houses to feed families in residence. Other crews worked at head start programs and the Salvation Army facilities painting offices and classrooms.

One crew labored at a site familiar to some past Work-A-Day participants. They were assigned to the Covenant Development Organization, where they painted a house located on 61st Street, the same house that, last year, volunteers helped clean out in preparation for renovation.

"I was part of the group that worked at Children's Place in Evanston, which is an organization that raises money for children with AIDS," Friedlander said. "We worked at their resell shop, tagging and marking clothing. Although, Work-A-Day is by definition a one-day event, we returned the next day to help them out some more because it was a lot of fun."

The popularity and success of the program thrilled Friedlander who suggests a Chicago school approach to the issue. "Maybe because there is no sense that the market will take care of itself that students feel the need to be involved; more so than they would if there was pressure to be there. I really think it's the kind of students who come. I think that is inspiring."

Neighbors

Neighbors is a volunteer community outreach group founded three years ago by a group of students led by David Hoffman '95. Hoffman was disappointed in the lack of interaction with the neighboring low-income Woodlawn community. In the summer of 1993, he approached community leaders with the idea of providing them assistance from a corps of student volunteers. Neighborhood leaders welcomed the idea and Neighbors was born.

The first year of operation proved the program's success, with over eighty-five students spending at least two hours a week volunteering in the Woodlawn community. According to Amy Hagen '97, the current director, the reasons for the program's success are twofold. "The original objective was to have enough diverse activities involving a diverse age range so that every interested law student could find an area that suited them. We also offer a wide range of sites close enough to the Law School to make volunteering convenient. But we are strict in one respect: volunteers must pledge to work at least two hours a week, and school work cannot be used as an excuse for missing a time commitment."

Currently, over sixty law students participate in one or more of Neighbors' nine programs. Volunteers offer one-on-one tutoring at area elementary schools, remedial reading courses at a local drug rehabilitation center, and teach adult literacy courses. They also serve meals at the First Presbyterian Church soup kitchen on Tuesdays. Neighbors' volunteers travel the short distance LaRabida Children's Hospital to visit with the inpatient children. There much of the time is spent simply playing with the children, Hagen says, "many of whom are in there for extended treatments and are bored, unhappy, or just lonely and need a friend." Law students spend some after-

**Neighbors volunteers visit with local**

**DAY CARE CHILDREN TWICE A WEEK.**

**AMY C. HAGEN '97**

**DIRECTOR, NEIGHBORS (1996)**

I began my involvement with Neighbors by volunteering for the drug rehab program. I met a lot of amazing people that first year and the experiences I derived from it were invaluable. I recognized how privileged I had been throughout my life. I learned to connect with someone who looks very different from me and who is in a very different situation than my own. I recognized how remarkable similar we were but that I was lucky to be born in the right place and at the right time. Once, after one gentleman and I finished an incredible conversation, I realized that there was a lot of me in him and vice versa, and if our positions in life had been switched, I might have been just like him and he might have been like me.

I think we truly are making a difference. Woodlawn community leaders have told us that working with our volunteers has improved their impression of the University and the students. That means a lot to us.
Afterschool Sports Program, noon softball, swimming to serve as a factor, who is serving students and people. It's a great experience. It's a reality check. It's people's life and not academic.

THE IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE LAW SOCIETY

The Immigration and Refugee Law Society (IRLS) was founded two years ago to provide interested students with exposure to immigration law matters. IRLS enables students to learn about immigration and refugee law by providing opportunities to work directly on asylum cases in conjunction with the Midwest Immigrant Rights Center. IRLS also allows law students to assist permanent residents in Chicago with the naturalization process.

IRLS was organized in 1994 by Lisa Thomas '96, to satisfy her interest in immigration and refugee work. During her first year at the Law School, she became aware of the work conducted by Roy Petty '81 at the Midwest Immigrant's Rights Center (MIRC) and contacted him. From Petty, Thomas learned that the MIRC was under the umbrella of The Heartland Alliance, a national program involved with general immigration work. The MIRC served as its refugee center. Thomas realized other students might also be interested.

"I felt that the school ought to have a program like this. I didn't feel like just complaining about it. So, I posted signs announcing my idea and wound up never once taking a case. I spent my entire time organizing the volunteers and getting the project off the ground."

The program offers students the opportunity to learn refugee and immigration legal proceedings on the job. Students have opportunities to work on asylum applications, assist with interpretation for MIRC clients at Immigration & Naturalization hearings, write legal briefs, and argue matters before Immigration judges. Additionally, the Society co-ordinates one-day volunteer projects in various Chicago neighborhoods, including assisting with efforts to organize naturalization papers of community members.

Students receive training and supervision from MIRC director Roy Petty who expresses great appreciation for the students' interest and energy, "It's really very helpful having law students involved. They may lack experience but they make up for it by being very bright and enthusiastic. It's a great experience for the law students because these are real people whose lives may be in danger. It's all very sobering. It's certainly no law school exercise. It's real life."

Thomas agrees, remembering the hard work of three Society members during one refugee case. "Linda Sheriff, John Motley, and Nick Coleman worked on a case defending a Palestinian refugee seeking asylum. They basically worked up the entire case, from finding the expert witnesses, to writing to the United Nations to get an amicus brief. They even had the opportunity to argue at a hearing. John Motley was a first-year student at the time. It was a lot of work."

Despite the fact that she hasn't handled a case personally, Thomas has no regrets. "I am really happy I started the society. I have a personal interest in immigration since I've lived in Egypt and France and consider myself an immigrant. It's a field that means a lot to me. It's one of the reasons I went to law school."