



Local attorneys reward local heroes

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By Greg Phillips

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Dothan Police Capt. Steve Parrish doesn't consider himself a hero.

The Alabama State Bar Association does.

Parrish was one of many Houston County first responders to attend the first day of the Dothan area's "Wills for Heroes" program at the Dothan Civic Center Thursday.

"Wills for Heroes" is a statewide initiative sponsored by the Alabama State Bar aimed at providing firefighters, law enforcement officers and medical personnel with free wills, advanced healthcare directives and power of attorney. The program has come to Dothan for the first time, with sessions held Thursday and Friday at the civic center.

"The officers in Dothan are very humbled and excited that this service is being provided to them," Parrish said. "Being a first responder is an inherently dangerous job, even though most of us don't consider it dangerous on a day-to-day basis."

Several local attorneys volunteered their time to provide the service, including Hamp Baxley, who coordinated the event locally.

"First responders provide a valuable service for very nominal pay," Baxley said. "This is a very small thing we attorneys can do to give them a service that would normally cost a good bit of money."

For Southern Junction volunteer firefighter Vickie Stephens and her husband, Todd, the program arrived at just the right time.

"This, for me, falls at a hard time in my life. I just lost my business partner, and he didn't have a will or anything," Stephens said. "If something happens to me or my husband, our wishes need to be honored."

Alabama is the fourth state to adopt the program, which developed after the events of Sept. 11, 2001.

"First responders are in a high-risk profession, and of all the police and firefighters involved in 9/11, less than 12 had wills," said Linda Lund, director of the state's Volunteer Lawyers Program. "Everyone should have a will, but when you take on risks each day, it's even more essential."

Parrish won't argue.

"Anytime you have a job where you might not come home at the end of the day, it's nice to know you're providing for your family," he said.

For volunteer workers like Stephens, the program serves as a reward of sorts.

"We don't have to pay fees for this just like we don't get paid for saving someone's house," Stephens said. "They're giving us a free service for our free service, so it's like everything is coming full circle."

Some local police officers are just happy to be on the good side of attorneys for a change.

"We as police are used to looking at attorneys on the other side of the room, so this is a nice service," Parrish joked.

Baxley said the program will provide services to between 60 and 70 of the several hundred eligible workers.

"We'll provide wills, power of attorney and living wills for 20-to-25 percent of those eligible," Baxley said.

According to Baxley, the state bar hopes to make "Wills for Heroes" an annual event that can serve even more workers.

"We're the only one in the state who reached out to volunteer departments, and there's a greater need with them, (because) volunteer departments are the largest (group of first responders) in the state," Baxley said. "We're feeling through the process, and it's possible this could even be a twice-a-year event."

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