

Wills for Heroes Program Offers Legal Help and “Peace of Mind” to First Responders

“After choosing a career involving service to others, it was very humbling to be on the receiving end,” Probation and Parole Officer Mark Davis said during a Wills for Heroes event in Amite, La. “I am grateful for the peace of mind I now have, thanks to the volunteers who prepared my estate planning documents.”

The Wills for Heroes program is designed to provide free legal services to first responders in the preparation of basic estate planning documents. Groups of attorney volunteers go to emergency service sites across Louisiana to set up one-day clinics where they draft basic wills, powers of attorney and health care directives for eligible first responders and their spouses.

The program was created shortly after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, when South Carolina attorney Anthony Hayes contacted his local fire department asking what lawyers could do to help. It became clear that there was a glaring need for estate planning services and, since then, the charitable program has provided more than 50,000 estate planning documents nationwide.

“As the wife of a firefighter, the Wills for Heroes program is very dear to my heart,” said Louisiana State Bar Association Young Lawyers Division (LSBA YLD) Wills for Heroes Co-Chair Betty A. Maury. “First responders selflessly place themselves at risk for the benefit of their community. The program brings a little peace to our Louisiana heroes and their family members.”

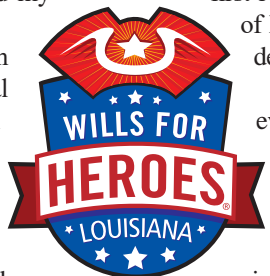
With events held across the country, there are now Wills for Heroes programs

in 28 states. The LSBA YLD hosted Louisiana’s first Wills for Heroes event in October 2008 for the Calcasieu Parish Fire Department in Lake Charles. Since that time, the YLD has continued to host events for Louisiana first responders, providing first responders with the equanimity of knowing their affairs are in order should the unthinkable occur.

At a typical Wills for Heroes event, attorney volunteers arrive early to receive one hour of CLE-approved training on preparing wills and other estate planning documents using hardware provided by the LSBA. Participating first responders download a questionnaire in advance of the meeting to be completed prior to their clinic appointment. The attorney volunteers work with each first responder to review the completed questionnaire in a confidential manner, while another volunteer enters the information into a laptop. Once the documents have been explained, the will, power of attorney and health care directive are generated, executed and notarized. The goal is to complete the entire process in one meeting. Each event averages 30 first responder participants.

“I can’t protect a firefighter who runs into a burning building or a police officer who is knocking on a door not knowing what’s on the other side,” said Wills for Heroes Foundation President Daniel McKenna in an interview with Comcast. “But, as a lawyer, I can help protect their families.”

To find more information and how to volunteer for upcoming events, go to: www.lsba.org/YLD/willsforheroes.aspx.



Wills for Heroes event in Lafayette, LA.



Wills for Heroes event in Baton Rouge, LA.



Wills for Heroes event in Amite, LA.



Wills for Heroes event in Covington, LA.



Wills for Heroes event in St. Tammany Parish.



Wills for Heroes event in Terrytown, LA.