

Justice in the court

Supreme Court judge to visit

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LAPEER — For the second time in three years the state Supreme Court's Chief Justice will be visiting the state's oldest working courthouse.

This time it's Supreme Court Chief Justice Marilyn Kelly and she'll be addressing the Lapeer County Bar Association at its luncheon meeting Thursday.

In 2007 then-Chief Justice Clifford W. Taylor and the entire high court bench came to Lapeer to hear oral arguments in a case that helped mark the end of two decades of renovations to the 164-year-old courthouse.

Kelly, said Lapeer Bar Association President Christine Strasser, will be discussing the possibility of creating a county pro bono program.

Pro bono, which comes from a Latin phrase meaning "for the public good," refers to lawyers and other professionals providing services to groups and individuals who can not afford to pay for

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them.

Strasser said Kelly is "a strong proponent" of pro bono work. She said that while many of the Lapeer County Bar Association's 80 members do pro bono work, there is no formalized program to put the

right people with the right attorneys. "We have an ethical obligation to do pro bono work," said Strasser.

From 1999 through 2003, Kelly was co-chair of the Open Justice Commission, an organization of the State Bar devoted to making justice available to all, regardless of factors like race, color, creed or disability. She is also on the governing board of the National Consortium for Racial and

Ethnic Fairness in the Courts. Her awards have ranged from the State of Israel Bonds Attorney Division's Eleanor Roosevelt Humanities Award to the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee's Guardian of Justice Award.

"We are very, very excited to get her," said Strasser.

Since October is pro bono month, Strasser, said she hopes the association's monthly luncheon leads to the creation

of a formalized pro bono program in the county. Among other things, she'd like the association to establish an expungement clinic, that would be free to qualifying Lapeer County residents.

Strasser noted that people who have been convicted of one crime, but who have been crime free for at least five years and meet other requirements, can have their record erased, or expunged. She said that's

important because people with criminal records can not get financial aid and have to disclose their record on job applications, which in this economy can create problems for people.

Although the Lapeer County Bar Association meeting is open only to association members, more information can be found at the state bar association's web site at www.mich-bar.org, by typing "pro bono" into the search window.

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