

# South Hero's David Carter Honored for Pro Bono Work

Attorney David Clinton Carter may live on an island, but he is far from isolated from the needs of his neighbors. The South Hero man's commitment to his community—from local to global—was recognized and rewarded with the Vermont Bar Association's 2011 Pro Bono Service Award.

Attorney Carter is an unabashed advocate for young people. That's what moved Franklin/Grand Isle Court Clerk Gaye Paquette to nominate him. "He always will take a case on behalf of children, either as an attorney or a GAL," Paquette stated. "He is very generous with his time when it involves children and has never refused unless he had a conflict."

David Carter's pro bono work for kids spans many years. But one case still remains in his memory. A number of years ago, Carter was appointed guardian ad litem for a family of five children who lived in total poverty. They had no heat, no food, and no attention to basic needs. One of the children was blind and needed surgery. The children were placed in foster homes, and more problems followed with one of the foster families. Carter followed the cases through the various court processes, obtained surgical care for his ward, and turned the children's lives onto a better path.

Carter's advocacy on behalf of young people does not stop at the courthouse door. He works to address the root of problems that propel families into court. Carter heads the child protection team for Grand Isle County. The team, composed of nurses, school counselors, DCF personnel, and attorneys, meet monthly to triage families in trouble. "We talk about families and home situations, cross-pollinate ideas for assisting them," says Carter. "We try to be proactive, intercepting families in trouble and providing services for them."

When one of those service providers—the Champlain Island Parent Child Center—needed help, Carter stepped forward. Under his chairmanship, the Center just completed a successful six-year capital campaign to raise \$950,000, helping to sustain its child care, parent support, play group, Head Start, and pre-kindergarten programs.

David Clinton Carter has made international connections because of his interest in young people. In 2004, Carter



was chosen to lead a Rotary Group Study Exchange team of young professionals on a month-long trip to India. "That was a life altering experience," he acknowledged.

During the trip, Carter visited an orphanage in India. A photo on his desk reminds him daily of the orphaned girl who gave him a flower. "She had nothing, and she was giving me a gift," said Carter. "I was really touched."

The Vermont attorney visited courts and lawyers in India, and came away with an appreciation for their culture of service. He spoke of the deeply held Hindu belief that it is the obligation of the upper classes to contribute to the welfare of the lower classes—by hiring them, by donating to them, by helping them improve their lives.

Carter makes the connection from India back home to pro bono work in Vermont. "All lawyers are people of privilege. We owe society a debt," he asserts. As he sees it, that debt should be repaid by service to those in need.

The culture of giving is comfortably familiar to David Clinton Carter, whose own family has a long history of public service. Carter is a scion of the prominent Clinton family of New York State. Family history is displayed on the walls of his law office, and he sits with visitors around a conference table once belonging to Millard Fillmore,

who lived just down the street from the Clinton ancestral home. Generations of the Clintons have served New York and the nation as magistrates, attorney general, congressmen, and governors. Carter is himself a seventh-generation lawyer—and his daughter will represent the eight generation when she graduates from George Washington Law School this year.

With all of those New York connections, why settle in Vermont? "I've been intrigued with small towns, and always wanted to be a small town lawyer," the South Hero attorney admits. So after attending UVM and Gonzaga Law School in Spokane, Washington, Carter came back to Vermont. He spent a few years with the Vermont Office of Child Support, then settled in South Hero in 1984, where he and his wife Barbara, a teacher, raised their daughters Erin and Leslie.

Pro bono work is an integral part of David Carter's practice. He dubs rural attorneys "the quasi legal aid of Vermont," and estimates that he personally spends three to four hours each week answering calls to guide people through a court case or legal situation they can't handle by themselves.

They can't pay for the service, so he doesn't charge.

But Carter points to himself as proof that an attorney can make a decent living in Vermont and do public service as well. "I've got everything I need," said Carter. "Earning more doesn't make people happier."

Carter urges younger lawyers to view pro bono work as good for their business. "Doing work for others is exposure in the community. It's good publicity." In Carter's experience, pro bono work has resulted in lifetime friendships, good connections, and paying clients. And Carter remains a firm believer that volunteerism improves the quality of life—for the individual giving service, and for the community receiving it. "This is about quality of life," says Carter.

In his solo law practice, Carter spends about half his time in real estate work, and the rest in family, probate, and small criminal defense cases. He is frequently called by the Grand Isle court clerk on short notice to represent defendants in arraignments. He also serves as a mediator in foreclosure mediations.

It is not unusual to see David Carter on the bench, as acting magistrate hearing

child support cases, or as acting traffic court judge where he has "heard the most wonderful excuses" over the twenty years he has served.

"These are tough times in the courts," Carter observes. He estimates that up to about 90% of the litigants are not represented by counsel, "and this lack of representation works against them."

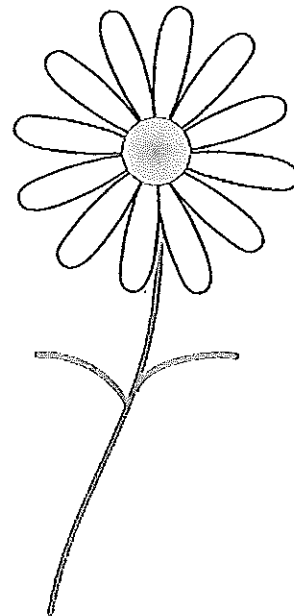
To round out his community service, David Carter serves as justice of the peace, a member of the Franklin-Grand Isle bar, and he is a thirty-four-year member of the Bolton Valley Ski Patrol. He has also served as an EMT, in the local Chamber of Commerce, and in his Rotary Club.

"It's the price you pay for living in a small community," Carter observes.

But with all of his years of public service, Carter was still surprised to be this year's recipient of the VBA's Pro Bono Award. "When Bob Paolini called me, I laughed and asked him what he was roping me into," Carter chuckled. "Bob kept saying, 'Really, no really, you've won the pro bono award.'"

During his remarks during the Pro Bono Award ceremony at the Mid-Year Meeting, Carter made a point to acknowledge and thank attorneys who serve on non-profit boards, on select boards, and doing pro bono work.

Says Carter of those colleagues who serve: "They are helping to change the stereotype of lawyers as selfish. They are spreading good will for our profession."



## Grace I Vermont's F SERVING VERMONT

- Grace se  
leveled  
time, on  
in a crisi
- Grace h  
resolutio
- Grace c  
homeow  
cases.
- Grace I  
strength  
preserve
- Grace bi  
that set i
- Please vi  
watch-tv

## Jessica Vermont's Se SERVING VERMONT

- Since Au  
cases by  
to addre  
appearin
- Jessica h  
plumbing  
lack of sr  
wiring, e.
- Jessica h  
Officers  
rental ho  
address c
- Jessica h  
Lead Po  
from the  
paint.