

# No Small Change.

AN OVERVIEW OF IMPACT: ANNUAL REPORT 2009



**PRAIRIE STATE LEGAL SERVICES**  
*Equal Access to Justice*

**No small change.** A double-entendre, and a fitting way to describe the profound impact of Prairie State Legal Services upon clients and community in 2009—juxtaposed with the impact of economic downturn upon our agency and those we serve.

As President Obama began his first year in office, legal services received a modest increase in funding from the Legal Services Corporation, the largest funder of legal services. Unfortunately, our other major funders, state-administered Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts (IOLTA) programs and the State of Illinois, went in a different direction.

In 2007, IOLTA income reached an all-time high of \$371.2 million nationally. But in 2008, IOLTA income fell to \$284 million (a 25 percent drop), and fell another 32 percent in 2009. In addition to losses in IOLTA funding, the State of Illinois reduced funding for civil legal services by half. As the number of people who need our help increased, the amount of funding available to support legal services programs decreased significantly.

Change was also seen in the legal needs of our clients. As a result of the poor economy, we encountered a growing number of clients in need of help with bankruptcy, consumer law issues, and foreclosures. Prairie State responded by focusing more of our resources in these areas of law. We provided training to our staff and pro bono attorneys to handle these newly-important issues. We also sought out new funding sources to support our expanded work on these matters.

In addition to the increase in types of cases, the overall demand for legal services continued to grow. More families fell into poverty in 2009, and the need for legal assistance has far exceeded our capacity. Today there are more Americans eligible for federally-funded legal services, about three million more, than in 2007.

In this stagnant economy, the legal problems our clients face are more numerous and complex, and the demand for civil legal services has spiked. Many times the help that is needed is help that only an attorney can provide. Fortunately, the communities we serve understand, value, and support our work. Hundreds of attorneys volunteer their time to provide pro bono help to our clients. Over a thousand individuals and law firms provide financial support to Prairie State.

We offer our sincere thanks, and hope for your continued help and support.

Working together, no change is too small.

Sincerely,



Michael O'Connor, *Executive Director*



## Inaugural Public Interest Law Fellows Program

In 2009, the University of Illinois College of Law started the Illinois Public Interest Law Fellows Program. The program is a College of Law initiative that creates opportunities for recent graduates to work for one year on behalf of the indigent and underserved. Support for the program comes from U of I College of Law alumnus Tim Hoffman, LLB. Prairie State Legal Services partnered with the college to place the fellows in Prairie State offices. The fellows would serve one year and be paid a stipend.

Three graduates from the class of 2009 came to work for Prairie State. Eric Sirota was placed in the Wheaton office, Tristan Bullington in the Bloomington office, and Ellen Samuel in the Waukegan office. The three all took varying roles in their office, ranging from evictions and housing issues to utility shutoff cases. The success from the program quickly became evident.

“Normally, we wouldn’t be able to hire recent graduates and provide them with extensive training and preparation while they work toward obtaining their license. In this case, the recent graduates are able to better prepare themselves for their eventual role as a staff attorney and we are able to provide more services to more clients,” said Stacey Tutt, Managing Attorney in the Bloomington office.

The program was so successful, in fact, that all three secured full-time positions with Prairie State before the end of their year of service. Eric Sirota became a staff attorney in the Wheaton office, Tristan Bullington stayed in Bloomington as a staff attorney, and Ellen Samuel became a staff attorney in the Rockford office.

We consider the U of I fellowship program a great success; it has enabled us to add staff despite tight finances, so that more clients are served. In addition, it has created opportunities for enthusiastic and talented young attorneys to perform rewarding legal work for those in need. We thank the University of Illinois College of Law for their partnership.



In 2009, the Will County Legal Assistance Program (WCLAP), located in Joliet, merged with Prairie State Legal Services (PSLS).

This is not the first time Prairie State has merged with another legal aid program. In fact, PSLS was created by the merger of five pre-existing Illinois legal services programs in Bloomington (McLean County), Geneva (Kane County), Peoria (Peoria County) Rockford (Winnebago County), and Waukegan (Lake County). Prairie State began serving clients on October 1, 1977 and our staff consisted of 15 attorneys, three paralegals, and one or two support persons in each office.

In the following years, Prairie State expanded to new locations and began serving in counties where previous legal organizations were located as well as the adjacent counties. These new locations included Kankakee, Ottawa, Rock Island, Wheaton, and Galesburg. While WCLAP was also located in the Prairie State service area, they sought to remain independent. As a result, WCLAP operated as a sub-grantee of Prairie State since the early 1980s.

By 2008, the historical reasons for WCLAP's independence were no longer valid, and both organizations decided to merge their operations. WCLAP staff had done a tremendous job gaining local support and funding, and the merger insured that these local fund sources would not be diverted and that WCLAP's reserves would be preserved for the sole benefit of services rendered in Will County.

With WCLAP joining in 2009, Prairie State now serves 36 Illinois counties in northern and central Illinois from 12 offices with a staff of approximately 120 persons including 74 attorneys. While the merger moves all administrative duties to Prairie State, Will County has gained some valuable assistance. Before the merger, WCLAP Director Amie Simpson had her case duties and was also in charge of the audit, compliance, grant writing and many other management duties. As a result of the merger, PSLS administrative staff will now handle those tasks so Amie can focus more of her time to case handling. Prairie State has also worked to retain the Will County staff and programs. In addition, a partnership with the University of Illinois College of Law has allowed Prairie State to place a recent graduate of the college in the Will County office as a fellow, providing an additional staff member.

We welcome the WCLAP staff to Prairie State, and join together in our common goal to provide equal access to justice for the poor and elderly.

## Protecting our clients from...



### Utility Shut-Offs

Anne\* needed help and fast. She had received a notice from the local water company that her water was going to be disconnected. This was a problem for Anne because she had bladder problems and needed a working toilet. She frequently had to use the bathroom and was also prone to infection, so the lack of water would have created serious medical problems for her.

Prairie State Attorney Elizabeth Deucher accepted the case and looked into the issue. Attorney Deucher explained to Anne that the water company cannot disconnect her service without giving notice. While Anne did receive a notice, it was only good for 40 days. The water disconnect took place well past those 40 days, and the company was required to send out a new notice before they disconnected. Because they did not follow the rules, they should reconnect Anne's water. Attorney Deucher quickly contacted the water company's attorney. She also contacted a local social service organization which agreed to pay Anne's bill if she could be put on a payment plan. After working with the water company's attorney, they agreed to put Anne on a payment plan and reconnect her water. Within one day, Anne had her water back on, was on a payment plan, and had her bill paid off. Now Anne can feel comfortable knowing that her water will stay on and her medical condition will stay under control.



### Housing Issues

For many, owning a home is the American dream. Mike\* and his wife were no exception, and were very happy when they purchased their end-unit townhome. Things were going great until a late night storm caused a defective sump pump in their basement to break, flooding the basement. Because they live in the end-unit, the sump pump in their basement serves the adjoining units as well.

Mike called the homeowners association emergency line several times the night of the flooding, but no one responded until the following morning. He got a new sump pump that day, but the association refused to pay for the damages, which were around \$4,000. Mike and

his wife didn't have the money to pay this and Mike knew that the bylaws of his homeowners association provided that the association was responsible for all repairs and any damage caused by the sump pump because it served additional units.

Mike and his wife decided to file a pro se lawsuit against the association, but they lost in arbitration because Mike was not aware of the procedural rules that applied to arbitration hearings. That is when they came to Prairie State for help.

Attorney Kathryn Liss accepted the case and filed an amended Complaint. Prior to the trial, Attorney Liss was able to negotiate a settlement with the homeowners association. The settlement provided Mike with enough money to fix the basement and live in a healthy environment once again.

### **Domestic Violence**

Volunteer attorneys are vital in providing access to justice for our clients. In Woodstock, Attorney H. Joseph Gitlin, who specializes in international family law, volunteered to take the case of Anna\*. Anna was a Latina woman that spoke no English when she first came to Prairie State. With Prairie State employee Cynthia Ortega interpreting by conference call, Anna was able to tell her story.

Anna had been married in Mexico five years earlier and had two daughters with her husband. She came to Prairie State because she was in a very dangerous domestic violence situation. In one incident of extreme sexual abuse, Anna had to go to the hospital and have surgery. She was also worried because her husband had been physically violent with one of the little girls. She had a plenary Order of Protection against him and was seeking a divorce, child support, and restricted visitation. After a few conversations over the telephone, Cynthia was able to locate a translator to work with Anna when she met with Mr. Gitlin. With Mr. Gitlin's help, Anna was granted sole custody of the children, child support was arranged, and visitation denied.

Without the help of a volunteer attorney, Anna's situation may have been quite different. Prairie State was only able to accept the case because Anna was a victim of domestic violence, and few attorneys have Mr. Gitlin's experience and knowledge of international family law. Another influential factor was that because the husband was in jail and did not respond, the case was resolved by a default judgment.

The judgment gave custody of the children to Anna and ordered her ex-husband to pay child support.

"The policy of my firm is to treat pro bono clients no differently than we would treat a paying client," said Mr. Gitlin. "Paying and non-paying clients deserve the same quality of service."

*\*The names have been changed to protect our clients privacy.*



## Awards and Honors

### STAFF ATTORNEY NAMED ONE OF ROCKFORD'S *FORTY LEADERS UNDER 40*

**Jeremy Bergstrom**, a staff attorney in the Rockford office, was chosen as one of Rockford's *Forty Leaders Under 40*. The program honors the region's best and brightest young professionals who make a difference in their community and are seen as tomorrow's leaders.

One of his most significant achievements was successfully representing clients in a federal lawsuit against HUD and the Rockford Housing Authority over the demolition of the Jane Addams Village. The resulting settlement helped tenants resettle, allowed the city to proceed with demolition and ensured that the development of affordable housing would be part of Rockford's economic development agenda. For his advocacy, Bergstrom and Prairie State were awarded the *2008 Housing Justice Award from the National Center on Poverty Law*.

### VOLUNTEER LAWYER PROJECT COORDINATOR HONORED WITH *2009 LIBERTY BELL AWARD*

**Marcy Heston**, Volunteer Lawyer Project Coordinator for our St. Charles office, was awarded the *2009 Kane County Bar Association Liberty Bell Award*. The award is bestowed on a non-attorney community organization or individual who has promoted a better understanding of the law, encouraged a greater respect for the law and the courts, who stimulates a sense of civic responsibility, and who contributes to good government within the community.

### PRAIRIE STATE ATTORNEY AWARDED *2009 PUBLIC SERVICE FELLOWSHIP*

**Vijay Raghavan**, a staff attorney who works in our Waukegan office providing tax-specific legal assistance to low-income taxpayers, received one of the *2009 Public Service Fellowships* from the ABA Section of Taxation. Before applying for the Fellowship, Vijay was in private practice with a major Chicago law firm representing clients in tax matters. Vijay applied for the Fellowship because "it seemed like the perfect opportunity to transition to legal aid without sacrificing my background in tax."

### PEORIA OFFICE RECOGNIZED PRO BONO EFFORTS

In 2009, the Peoria office of Prairie State selected **Attorney Michael Fricke** as the *2009 Pro Bono Attorney of the Year*. The office honored **Heyl, Royster, Voelker & Allen** as the *Law Firm of the Year* at the Annual Meeting of the Peoria County Bar Association.



### ROCK ISLAND HONORED LOCAL VOLUNTEERS AND DONORS

The Rock Island office held their annual Campaign for Legal Services Kick-Off Luncheon to recognize the outstanding individuals and firms that support Prairie State. Mike O'Connor, Executive Director of Prairie State Legal Services, presented awards to **Deere & Co. Global Law Services Group**, and **Mr. Dennis VanDerGinst** for their outstanding support of the 2009 Campaign for Legal Services.

### KANKAKEE ATTORNEY AWARDED *PRO BONO ATTORNEY OF THE YEAR*

In 2009, the Kankakee office of Prairie State selected **Ken Leshen** as the *2009 Pro Bono Attorney of the Year* at the Law Day Luncheon sponsored by Kankakee County Bar Association.

### FOX VALLEY VOLUNTEER RECEIVED *PRO BONO AWARD*

The *Kane County Bar Foundation Pro Bono Award* was presented to **Elizabeth Berrones-Rotchford** for pro bono services far beyond anyone's imagination. The award was presented by Marcy Heston at the Kane County Foundation Gala.

### LIFESAVER AWARDS GIVEN TO BLOOMINGTON VOLUNTEERS

In 2009, the Bloomington office of Prairie State Legal Services selected attorneys **Lisa Behle**, **Michelle Mancias**, and **Fred Moore** to receive a *Lifesaver Award* for their pro bono service.



## McHENRY COUNTY HONORED LOCAL ATTORNEYS AND FIRMS



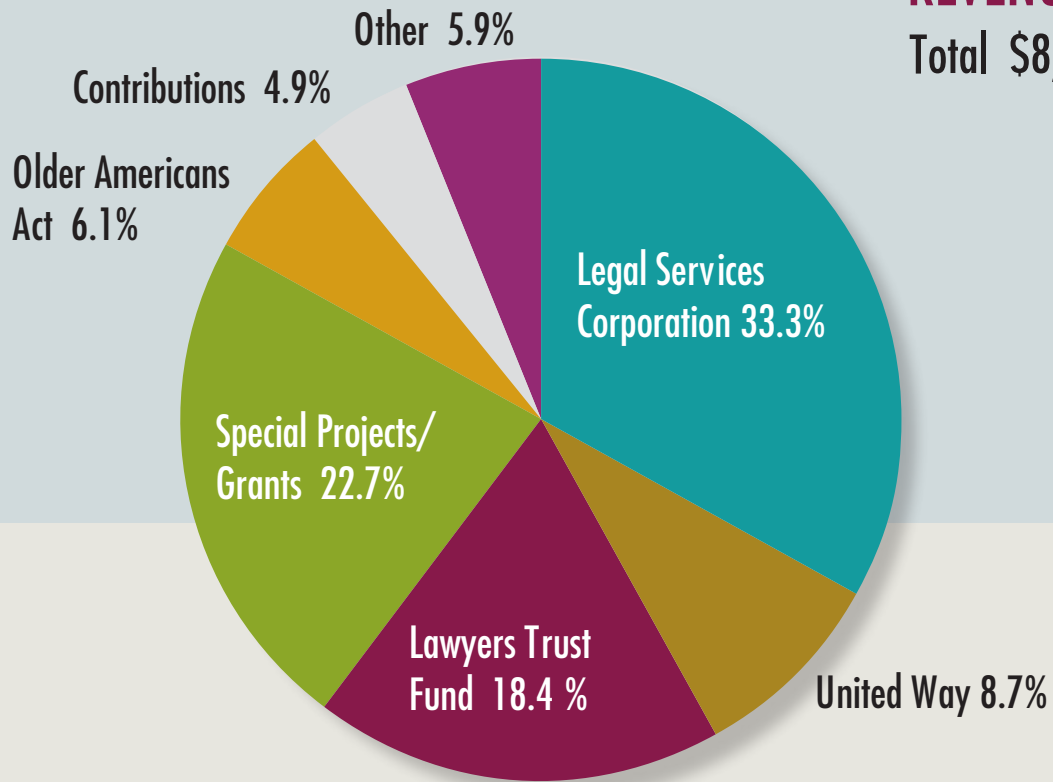
In 2009, the Woodstock office chose awardees based on their outstanding support of the Legal Aid program—they all had taken cases through the Legal Aid program for many consecutive years. Two individual volunteers, **Attorney Heidi Aavang** and **Attorney Mathew Perrone, Jr.**, were recognized. Attorney Aavang provided financial assessment services to clients to see if they would benefit by filing

bankruptcy, and also worked with them to correct credit problems. Attorney Perrone, Jr. assisted clients with wills, estates, guardianships, and adoptions.

The office also recognized two firms for encouraging their attorneys to support pro bono efforts on an ongoing basis for years. Both firm's pro bono efforts were led by the partners setting the example by taking cases themselves. **Campion, Curran, Dunlop, Lamb & Cunabaugh** was recognized, as well as the firm of **Gitlin, Busche & Stetler**.

# FINANCIAL STATEMENT 2009

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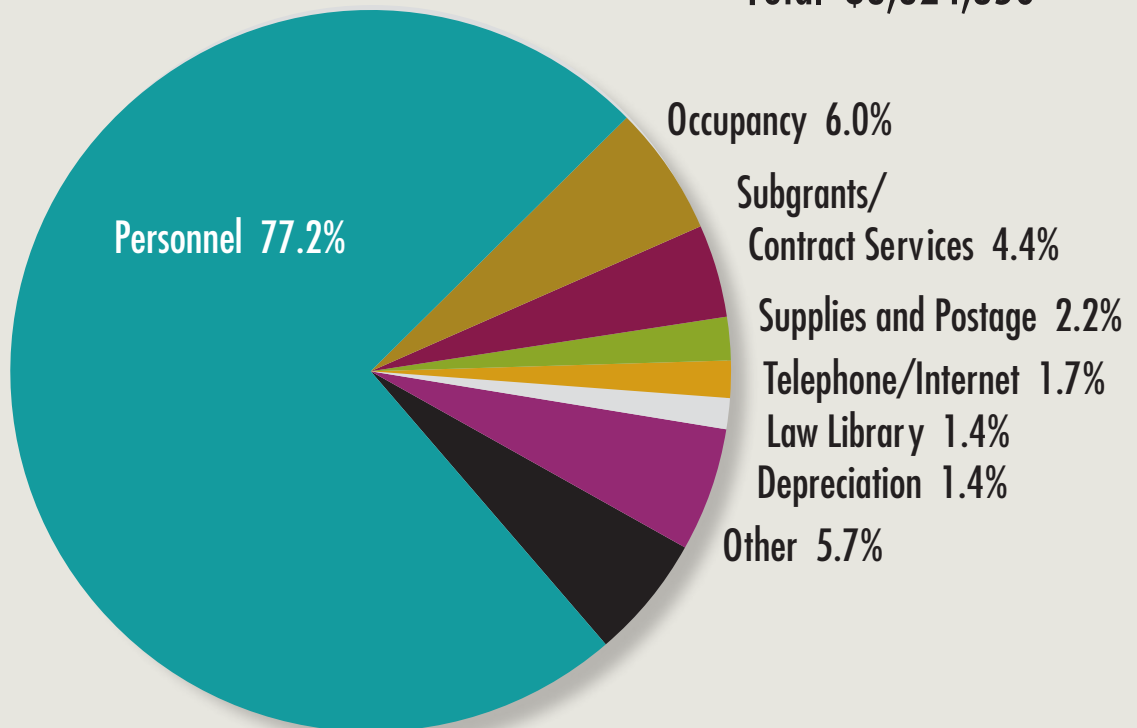


## REVENUE

Total \$8,850,991

## EXPENDITURES

Total \$8,824,350



# PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Each year, dozens of partner organizations commit their resources in order to help us provide legal services for populations and communities throughout our service area. In 2009, the following partners helped ensure access to justice for tens of thousands of clients in northern and central Illinois.

American Bar Association	Lake County Department of Planning and Development
Aurora Mental Health & Mental Retardation Services	Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois
Bureau County United Way	Legal Services Corporation
Catholic Charities	McHenry County Dept. of Planning and Development
Central Illinois Agency on Aging	Northeastern Illinois Area Agency on Aging
Chicago Department of Public Health	Northwest Illinois HIV Care Connect
City of Aurora Police Department	Northwestern Illinois Area Agency on Aging
City of Aurora Division of Neighborhood Redevelopment	Rock Island 708 Mental Health Board
City of Bloomington Township	St. Charles 708 Mental Health Board
City of DeKalb	St. Charles Township
City of Peoria Neighborhood Development Division	U.S. Dept. of Housing & Urban Development
City of Waukegan Community Development Block Grant	U.S. Dept. of Justice
Community Chest of Dwight	United Way of Boone County
County of DuPage Human Services	United Way of Central Kane County
County of DuPage Senior Services	United Way of DuPage County
County of McHenry Tax Levy	United Way of Eastern LaSalle County
DeKalb County Community Services Department	United Way of Grundy County
DuPage Community Development Commission	United Way of Illinois Valley
The DuPage Community Foundation	United Way of Kankakee County
East Central Illinois Care Connect	United Way of Knox County
East Central Illinois Area Agency on Aging	United Way of Lake County
Fox Valley United Way	United Way of Lee County
Heart of Illinois United Way	United Way of McDonough County
Herbolsheimer Foundation	United Way of McHenry County
Illinois Attorney General's Office	United Way of McLean County
Illinois Bar Foundation	United Way of Metro Chicago
Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority	United Way of North Shore/North Suburban
Illinois Department of Children and Family Services	United Way of Northwest Illinois
Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity	United Way of Northwest Suburban
Illinois Department of Human Services	United Way of Ogle County
Illinois Department of Public Health	United Way of Pekin
Illinois Equal Justice Foundation	United Way of Pontiac
Illinois Office of Rehabilitation Services	United Way of Rock River Valley
Joliet Township	United Way of the Quad Cities Area
Kendall County Tax Levy	United Way of Will County
Kishwaukee United Way	University of Illinois
	Warren County United Way
	Western Illinois Area Agency on Aging

# Thank you

We thank our individual and corporate supporters who gave so generously in time and money to Prairie State Legal Services in 2009.

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## **\$10,000 or more**

Caterpillar Foundation  
Anthony C. Raccuglia  
United Way of Eastern LaSalle County  
VanDerGinstLaw, P.C.

## **\$5,000 to \$9,999**

A & E Kaplan Foundation  
Anonymous  
Arthur & Gesena Griffin Trust  
Heyl, Royster, Voelker & Allen  
Howard & Howard  
Legal Helpers  
McLean County Bar Association  
Quinn, Johnston, Henderson,  
Pretorius & Cerulo  
S. Edward Marder Family  
Foundation in honor of the  
Chris and Linda Marder Family  
United Way of Illinois Valley, Inc.

## **\$2,500 to \$4,999**

Bozeman, Neighbour, Patton & Noe, LLP  
John Condon  
Deere & Company Global  
Law Services Group  
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Gitlin Busche & Stetler  
Illinois Trial Lawyers Association  
Legal Aid 2009  
William and Suzanne Lindsay  
Mahoney & Hauser, Ltd. in honor of  
Hon. Francis X. Mahoney  
McHenry County Bar Association  
Annual Holiday Party  
Peoria County Bar Association,  
Strides for Justice

## **\$1,000 to \$2,499**

Ackman, Marek, Meyer & Boyd, Ltd.  
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Ann Buche Conroy including gifts in  
memory of Wayne Flanigan and in  
memory of Eva Schwartzman  
Bob and Lauri Dewey  
Dudley & Lake  
First Midwest Bank  
Gretchen Fisher  
Deb Goldberg and Neil Puller  
including gifts in respectful memory  
of John Joseph Collins and in loving  
memory of Annette Coven  
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Arlene Falotico  
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The Community Foundation of  
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Steven L. Larson  
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Mike and Laura O'Connor  
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Louis P. Milot and Hon. Lisa Y. Wilson

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Lynn and Dick Batcher  
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Bob and Val Coletta  
Michael J. Conway  
Lisa R. Corwin  
Dam, Snell & Tavierne, Ltd.  
Anne Megan Davis and Scott Davis  
in honor of Sarah C. Megan  
Claire de Chazal



**PRAIRIE STATE LEGAL SERVICES**  
*Equal Access to Justice*

AN OVERVIEW OF IMPACT: ANNUAL REPORT 2009

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**\$250 to \$499**

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 Salvi, Schostok & Pritchard  
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 Kendrick L. Scott  
 Attorney Darrell K. Seigler  
 The Law Office of Marjorie Sher in  
 memory of Norton Lesser  
 Bill and Julie Snively  
 Nancy Sohn in honor of  
 Sarah Megan and Kathy Bettcher  
 Debra L. Stegall  
 Stacy Thomas  
 Tobin & Ramon  
 Ed Tomkowiak  
 Dennis Triggs  
 Jay and Cathy Trost  
 Gregory E. Tuite  
 Stacey Tutt  
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### **\$100 to \$249**

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