

VOLUNTEER LAWYERS SERVICE

Robert Omura ~ Active in Volunteering

Robert Omura of Caron and Partners LLP, is the first lawyer chosen to be featured in this Volunteer Profile Series, not only because he has been the most active volunteer in the Volunteer Lawyers Service program, but because he genuinely exemplifies the spirit of volunteerism.

Since joining the Volunteer Lawyers Service in February 2005, Mr. Omura has been matched with four individual files, and he has developed a workshop for the VLS, which helps new charitable organizations with their programs' start up concerns. Mr. Omura facilitated this workshop for the first time last year, and due to its success, he will continue to run the workshop annually each May. He is also currently working collaboratively with a U of C law school student on a "self-help" workbook to assist these organizations.

We asked Mr. Omura a few questions about his experiences in volunteering for our program, and here is what he had to say:

Q: How did you first hear about the Volunteer Lawyers Service?

A: I think I first found out about the VLS program from a notice that was sent around to all lawyers, probably in the CBA materials.

Q: What prompted you to join the volunteer roster?

A: I thought I could contribute something useful. Often in the practice of law it's difficult to get a sense that you've actually made a difference. By volunteering you get a fairly concrete sense of doing something that really mattered. It's surprising the knowledge we have and take for granted. Most people out there do not know where to start looking for information. Where it might take a layperson weeks to find the answer to a question, often we can answer in a few minutes. In the fast paced life we live in these days it's important to take a few hours to put something back into the community. I know the stats are high for the Calgary bar's volunteer commitment to the City, but there are still many out there who do not take the time to put something back into the community. Volunteering is a wonderful way to do that, make a difference and have some fun. How could anybody refuse an offer like that?

Q: What is it about volunteering for the Service that appeals to you?

A: The appreciation that people have for your help, the satisfaction that you have something to contribute to others, and the knowledge that it does make a difference. These are wonderful qualities of volunteering.

Q: What has your experience working with matched organizations through the VLS been like?

A: The matched organizations have put a lot of thought

into what they are looking for. This makes it easier to deal with their concerns. I think there seem to be two groups: those who are just starting out and require basic information; and, those who have a clear idea what they are looking for from a volunteer lawyer – a specific plan in mind.



Q: What made you decide to facilitate the workshop that you hosted last year? And what was that experience like?

A: I think it was a wonderful opportunity to organize the process in my own head and to think about how to explain it. The experience was wonderful. Small groups are a good way for some one-to-one discussion. The feedback is immediate. Unfortunately, there simply wasn't enough time to address all the questions. In the future I would like to have more of a panel discussion approach, with an accountant, and even perhaps someone from Industry Canada. A workshop could be arranged to have two components or two separate workshops – the first to explain the process and the second to help put together the forms.

Q: Would you recommend colleagues to participate in this program?

A: Absolutely. I think that colleagues can get a lot from a small commitment of a few hours a month.

Mr. Omura was called to the bar in 2000. Although he began his career in the area of personal injury law, his primary practice interests include civil litigation, corporate/commercial, family, real estate and wills and estates. Prior to his career in law, Mr. Omura completed his undergraduate degree in psychology, and then worked as a child and youth/family crisis worker, for about ten years. Later he completed a Masters in History before entering Dalhousie Law School in Halifax, NS. In his free time, Mr. Omura enjoys hiking, and climbing in the mountains, skiing in winter and cycling and running in summer. Throughout the course of his studies and careers, he has always remained active in volunteering.

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To find out more about the Volunteer Lawyers Service, contact Cyndy Morin, VLS Project Coordinator at 403-218-4317, or by e-mail at vlsv@cba-alberta.org.

Note: Canadian Lawyers Insurance Association insurance coverage is available for lawyers who take on a *pro bono* file with this Service.