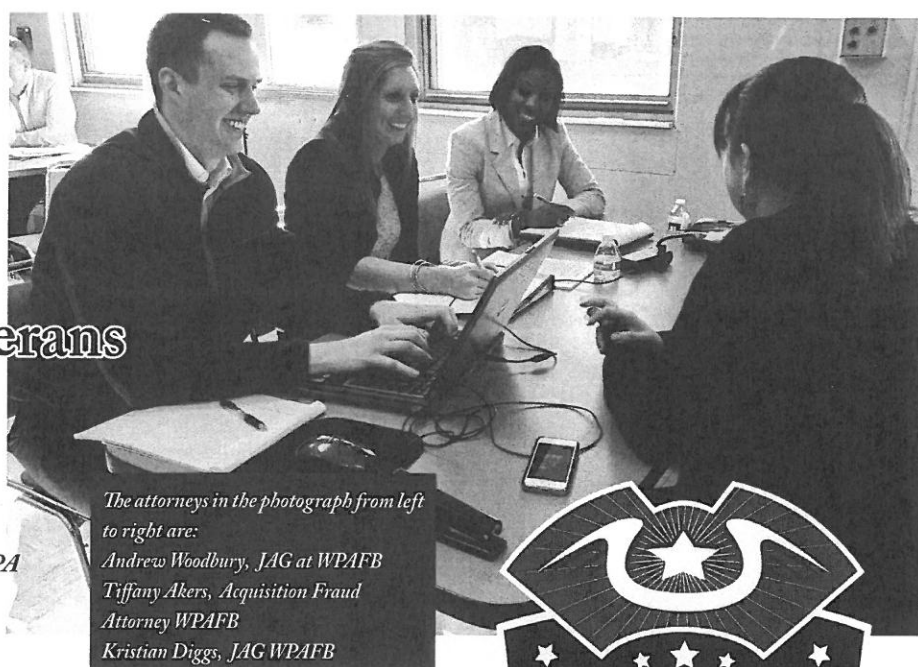


Recap: The DBA Holds Its First Wills for Veterans



By Michelle T. Sundgaard Esq.
DBA Editorial Board
Pickrel Schaeffer & Ebeling Co., LPA



The attorneys in the photograph from left to right are:
Andrew Woodbury, JAG at WPAFB
Tiffany Akers, Acquisition Fraud Attorney WPAFB
Kristian Diggs, JAG WPAFB



“I went to law school to advocate for veterans. Helping veterans is my motivation.” Tessa Ortiz-Marsh is a student at the University of Dayton School of Law and a proud veteran of the United States Army. On November 5, 2016, she and more than twenty other lawyers, law students, and paralegals joined together at the Dayton VA Medical Center to provide wills and other estate documents for veterans and their families. The Dayton legal community is composed of veterans and friends, family, and spouses of active and retired military personnel. With Veteran’s Day approaching and Wright Patterson Air Force Base in our back yard, the Greater Dayton Volunteer Lawyers Project and the Ohio Military/Veterans Legal Assistance Project made November 5th memorable for over twenty-five veterans and their families.

The morning began with training for all volunteers held by Erik R. Blaine, an attorney with Wright & Schulte LLC. Erik provides training for each Wills for Heroes event, and in this case, for the Dayton Bar Association’s first ever Wills for Veterans event. Along with a lecture on the mechanics of the program for the volunteers, Erik ensures that the licensed attorneys are giving competent counseling while drafting last wills and testaments, powers of attorney, and living wills for the clients taking part in this program. Erik’s passion is a large part of this successful program.

After Erik’s training, the licensed attorneys paired with one or two volunteers and began serving those that have proudly served our county. Wills for Veterans attracted volunteers from many different fields of the law, including probate, litigation, and compliance lawyers, and even lawyers that work at Wright Patterson Air Force Base, who assist the men and women in the Armed Services every day. The volunteers worked diligently with each client until every veteran that registered or walked-in received the estate planning documents needed. Prior to leaving, the attorney reviews the draft estate planning documents with the veteran participant to ensure that each person understands and agrees to what they are executing. Once finalized, the documents are signed, witnessed, and notarized in a formal signing ceremony. The veteran participant then takes the estate planning documents.

The national Wills For Heroes program began shortly after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. The founder of the program, Anthony Hayes, contacted his local fire department, realizing the glaring need for estate planning services. Since then, this program is active in ten states, providing first responders with free estate planning documents. Wills for Heroes has been an active program of the Dayton

Bar Association since 2008, and it is the only active program in Ohio. Now, after the continuous success of this program, the Dayton Bar Association has opened its arms to the veterans in our community by having its own Wills for Veterans.

In the September issue of Bar Briefs, the Honorable Mary L. Wiseman discussed the importance of returning the honor. She noted the need to “embrace our common ground of lending a helping hand to those in need and honoring those that have given the greatest service to our nation.” Legal services are scarce for our veterans, and it is our duty as lawyers and community leaders to guarantee that our community of local veterans is protected. The men and women of the Armed Forces put their lives on the line for us, and the Dayton Bar Association and the Ohio Military/Veterans Legal Assistance Project guarantee that we are “serving those who have served.” ●

