

Hillsborough County Bar Association Sponsors First WILLS FOR HEROES Program in Tampa Bay Area

Hillsborough County Attorneys Draft Wills for Local First Responders

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The Hillsborough County Bar Association *Wills for Heroes* program sponsored its first event on October 22, 2011, at the Chester H. Ferguson Law Center located at 1610 North Tampa Street. At this event, the *Wills for Heroes* program offered free wills, health care advance directives and durable powers of attorney to first responders and their spouses or partners who were members of Tampa Fire and Rescue. A total of 10 estate plans were completed by 5 volunteer attorneys, with 16 additional volunteer attorneys and paralegals acting as witnesses and notary publics for the execution of the estate planning documents as well as one volunteer providing specialized technical assistance.

The Hillsborough County Bar Association *Wills for Heroes* program is under the auspices of the *Wills for Heroes* Foundation, which was organized shortly after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The organizers of the Foundation contacted their local fire department asking what lawyers could do to help that department, and during an impromptu focus group it became evident that there was a glaring need for estate planning services. Since then, the *Wills for Heroes* program, which operates in 10 states, has provided more than 7,000 free estate planning documents for first responders.

According to a November 2007, Forbes magazine article, a PNC Wealth Management survey found that 30% of adults with investible assets of at least \$500,000.00 did not have a will, and the same article references a Harris interactive survey completed for Lawyers.com finding that 55% of the general population had no will.

Paradoxically, these numbers are even lower for the first responder community. Despite the inherently dangerous nature of their jobs, an overwhelmingly large number of first responders, approximately 80 to 90%, do not have even simple wills. *(These figures are based only on experiential data and feedback from state and national first responder organizations, and the Wills for Heroes Foundation has no information concerning any agency organization that does or can track this type of information.)*

Thus, the relatively low numbers of first responders with wills speaks to the selflessness of first responders, to think of others first and to put the good of the community before themselves. First responders selflessly devote their lives to serving their communities and are prepared to pay the ultimate price in the line of duty. The *Wills for Heroes* program is devoted to “protecting those who protect us.”

The benefits of the Wills for Heroes program for the members of Tampa Fire and Rescue were best summed up by Driver/Engineer, Gary Tinschert, Tampa Airport Fire Station #2, who said, "I have peace of mind knowing that when I am on the job, my family has a level of protection we never would have had without the Wills for Heroes program."

For more information concerning the Wills for Heroes Foundation and ways you can assist in "protecting those who protect us", please go to www.willsforheroes.org, and for ways you can help the Wills for Heroes local efforts through the Hillsborough County Bar Association, please go to www.tinyurl.com/WFHeroes.

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