

Caterpillar, Inc., Lawyers Offer Pro Bono Services to Nonprofit Organization

In-House News:

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By Brooke Heath

What do the world's leading manufacturer of construction and mining equipment and a nonprofit organization formed to help the country of Malawi have to do with the legal profession? Plenty if you are Michael Hurst, Caterpillar, Inc.'s in-house intellectual property lawyer. Hurst is just one of the many Caterpillar, Inc., employees to get involved with the manufacturer's new pro bono program that began in November 2006.

Hurst has had the opportunity to provide free legal services to the Malawi Connection, a charity that helps raise funds to aid the small African country with a population of 13,013,926. When the organization needed help trademarking its name and logo, Hurst was able to help. According to Law.com, Hurst has worked for 10 pro bono hours on the application and is awaiting its approval from the Patent and Trademark Office. As of April, Caterpillar's lawyers have devoted more than 580 hours in free legal services.

Deputy General Counsel Michael Sposato is overseeing the effort. "It was obvious to me that if the opportunities [for more pro bono work] were there, people would do it more," Sposato told Law.com.

The Malawi Connection is very grateful for the assistance of Caterpillar's legal team. Its president, James Rademaker, told Law.com, "We never expected this large of a corporation to be interested. You never know how you can tap into their talents and how excited they can be about opportunities to help."

Based in Michigan, the Malawi Connection was incorporated in 2006 to raise funds to provide aid to the people of Malawi. The nonprofit organization focuses its attention primarily on the rural villages in the Mpondasi District. The charity was founded by residents of Michigan who befriended Clement Chiwaya, a native of the country who was going to school in Grand Rapids.

According to Law.com, Caterpillar sought to help the organization after learning of it through one of the company's attorneys, whose father-in-law was outside counsel to the charity.

Caterpillar is not done lending aid to the Malawi Connection. According to Law.com, Sposato is looking at ways that Caterpillar can further assist the charity. The general counsel would like to initiate a microfinancing system to allow people in Malawi to take out loans for their small businesses.

On the Net

Caterpillar

www.cat.com

Malawi Connection

www.malawiconnection.org

Why Lawyers Should Take on Pro Bono Work

www.law.com/jsp/article.jsp?id=1155214182851