

CBA Volunteer Attorneys Give Back to Veterans at Stand Down Event

By Dana Allen

Dana Allen is the CBA marketing specialist.



Among our many volunteer attorneys: Erich J. Heinonen with the Connecticut National Guard, Veterans' and Military Affairs Section Executive Committee member Eric Miller, Iraq combat veteran Dennis M. Carnelli, and Marine Colonel Thomas L. Kanasky.

The Connecticut Bar Association was honored to once again join over 70 agencies and social service organizations helping Connecticut veterans at Stand Down 2016. We spent time with three of our CBA volunteer attorneys at Stand Down this year to learn how they are helping, and what motivates them to give their time and talent.

CBA member **Marine Colonel Thomas L. Kanasky** has volunteered for Stand Down since the CBA first became involved in the event in 1998. Marine Colonel Kanasky is on the executive committee of CBA's Veterans' and Military Affairs Section, and he is also active in the Commercial Law and Bankruptcy Section as well as a member of the House of Delegates for District 5. He was serving as chair of the Veterans' and Military Affairs Section when fellow CBA member John Jepson got a call from the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs, asking if the CBA could get some volunteers to come out and provide legal assistance for veterans.

"Those early years were very different, with hardly any transportation, no judge on site, and a few hundred veterans," Kanasky says. "Now, we don't have those problems—they have dozens of buses bringing thousands of veterans in."

Marine Colonel Kanasky is particularly

pleased that the number Stand Down volunteers from CBA's Veterans' and Military Affairs section members keep growing every year, and he proudly notes that many of our volunteer attorneys are under the age of 40. He's helped veterans over the years with disability and custody issues, but his most impactful moment was when he took a veteran to the

judge on site and helped get his driver's license renewed.

"Any veteran can come here with their issue, and our purpose is to give him or her the assistance they need," he says. "Maybe it's just listening—the willingness of these people to lay out their soul, even when they've faced so many obstacles, is very moving."

A combat veteran of the Iraq War, CBA member **Dennis M. Carnelli** volunteered as a Stand Down attorney for the first time this year. After serving in the Army, he started his law career as a clerk at the Connecticut Veterans Legal Center, Attorney Carnelli is now with the firm O'Connell Attmore & Morris. He is also an active member in CBA's Veterans' and Military Affairs, Appellate Advocacy, and Young Lawyers Sections.

He was impressed by the scope of veteran services at Stand Down, which included everything from hearing screenings to foot washes to a pop-up courtroom with a superior court judge on hand. Attorney Carnelli spent his time at Stand Down helping veterans with legal assistance for DMV and mortgage issues.

Another CBA member, Eric Miller, has been volunteering for Stand Down for the

past few years. Attorney Miller is on the CBA's executive committee for the Veterans' and Military Affairs Section, and he's also active in the Federal Practice, Litigation, and Young Lawyers Sections. He praised his employer, Murtha Cullina LLP, for their commitment in allowing their employees to volunteer, and he says he volunteers as a CBA attorney for Stand Down to honor his veteran grandfathers, who both served in World War II.

"When you're a lawyer, I believe you have an obligation to give back to your community," he says. "And these veterans have given us so much."



CBA volunteer Major Michael E. Criscuolo, a JAG attorney with the US Army, provides a listening ear and legal help to a fellow veteran.

Attorney Miller spent his time at this year's Stand Down working with veterans on a variety of issues, including Social Security, income taxes, and housing. One veteran was an author who'd stopped receiving royalties and needed advice, and in one instance, Attorney Miller walked a veteran directly over to Stand Down's public defender booth—where another CBA member, Maggie Castinado, was volunteering—and got immediate help with a criminal records issue.

"It's definitely one of the pros of Stand Down, to have so many groups working together," he says. "This is just a great opportunity to provide a wide range of services to folks who really need it. And, sometimes it's good to just be a sounding board." **CL**