WILLS FOR HEROES – Offered by the Young Lawyers Division of the Utah State Bar

By Stephanie Wilkins Pugsley

On September 11, 2001, thousands of first responders risked their lives to save their fellow Americans. Three hundred and forty-three firefighters, twenty-three police officers, and thirty-seven port-authority police officers made the ultimate sacrifice. Out of that tragedy arose an amazing idea: Wills for Heroes. The Wills for Heroes program provides absolutely free wills, living wills, healthcare and financial powers of attorneys to first responders and their spouses or domestic partners. Nationwide, since November 2001, the programs have prepared over 8,000 estate-planning documents for first responders. To learn more about the Wills For Heroes Foundation and the other work they are doing, please visit their website at www.willsforheroes.org.

Every day, in every town and city across the nation, including here in Utah, first responders—firefighters, police, and EMT—put their lives at risk to protect us. In partnership with The Wills for Heroes® Foundation, the Utah Young Lawyers Division has brought this unique, much-needed program here to Utah and to our local first responders.

Utah was the 12th state to adopt the program. Since the YLD first brought the program to Utah in March of this year, more than 320 estate plans have been provided to Utah first responders from Logan to St. George, in the first 3 Wills for Heroes events alone. The Utah YLD has scheduled Wills for Heroes events for the third Saturday of every month.

For more information about Utah’s Wills For Heroes program, or to schedule a Wills For Heroes event for your department, please visit the Utah YLD’s informational website. http://www.utahbar.org/sections/yld/willsforheroes/Welcome.html The website has information just for first responders, frequently asked questions, a calendar of events, contact information, and telephone numbers of individuals who can help you with specific questions. Most importantly, the website will provide you with the best information about the Utah Wills for Heroes program, as the website is updated frequently.

What is a Wills For Heroes Event?

A Wills For Heroes Event is a joint effort between a first responder department and the Utah Young Lawyers Division. The YLD, however, does most of the work. The first responder department is asked to do two things: 1) provide a location for the event, a classroom or a conference room with tables and chairs where the event may be held; and 2) provide an individual to disseminate information and coordinate appointments with the departments’ individuals. The YLD does the rest of the work. The YLD emails the department contact a Wills for Heroes invitation to be sent to all personnel inviting them to the Wills for Heroes event. Along with the invitation, the YLD provides some explanatory information, as well as a questionnaire to be filled out and brought along to the Wills for Heroes event. By sending the questionnaire ahead of time, all participating individuals may consider important decisions with a loved or trusted individual prior to their appointment.
The day of the Wills for Heroes event, the YLD brings laptop computers that have been preloaded with specialized software that takes the questionnaire information and creates the wills, living wills, healthcare and financial powers of attorneys (all in about 30 minutes). They also bring printers, paper, shredders, attorneys, notaries, witnesses, and all of the materials needed for the first responders to be able to walk out of their appointments with fully executed and legal estate plans. At the end of every Wills for Heroes event, the Utah YLD wipes each of the laptop computers clean, so that none of the private information from any of the participating individuals is kept on the computers.

The Utah YLD looks forward to many years of Wills for Heroes Events in Utah based on the unparalleled interest from attorneys, paralegals (who notarize the documents making them legal and binding) and the many first responder departments around the state. The YLD is pleased to report that in the first six weeks that the program was in Utah, more than 250 attorneys were trained on the Wills for Heroes software, and have expressed their continued support of the program; nearly 100 paralegals received the Wills for Heroes training; and many first responder departments have expressed interest in the program. The YLD looks forward to continually working to meet the expressed interest.

Wills for Heroes is a public service project that by its very nature expresses respect and support for first responders and that exemplifies public service by “protecting those who protect us.”

Stephanie Wilkins Pugsley is the Immediate Past President of the Utah Young Lawyers Division and Utah’s Liaison to the Wills For Heroes Foundation. [www.willsforheroes.org](http://www.willsforheroes.org)

Officer T. Bangerter St. George P.D. and Wills For Heroes Foundation Co-Founder Jeff Jacobson at the March 14, 2008 Utah WFH Kick-off event, St. George, Utah.
Police Chief Wade Carpenter (formerly of Ivins, now of Park City) new YLD President Karthik Nadesan, and a St. George attorney preparing the Chief’s documents at the March 14th event.

The May 2nd Wills for Heroes Event held at the UTA facility in Salt Lake City.

Document preparation at the May 2nd Event at the UTA facility in SLC.