



ALISON CHURCH/GC SOUTH

Helping in-house lawyers meet their pro bono match

BY MELANIE A. LEVS

Coke's Michael Kline is leading the charge to launch a nonprofit group that will link in-house lawyers to pro bono opportunities.

ATLANTA IN-HOUSE lawyers who've avoided pro bono work because they rarely see the inside of a courtroom soon will have a new resource for doing good—one that's tailored to fit a transactional skill set.

It all started about a year ago, when Rick Hobish, executive director of the White Plains, N.Y.-based Pro Bono Partnership,

spoke to several representatives from Atlanta corporate legal departments and law firms at a luncheon sponsored by GE Power.

Hobish discussed his organization, a clearinghouse for pro bono legal work in parts of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. His group screens incoming requests by nonprofits for business-

related pro bono services such as contracts, trademarks, employment issues and real estate—just the types of transactional matters in-house lawyers are used to handling.

Hobish's presentation inspired in-house attorneys at the luncheon—lawyers from companies such as GE, The Coca-Cola Co. and Cox Communications—to

form a board of directors and start raising funds to create the Pro Bono Partnership of Atlanta. Michael J. Kline, intellectual property counsel for Coke, who is overseeing the board, says that, so far, the Atlanta group has raised more than \$100,000 from several large Atlanta-based corporations and law firms and is continuing to solicit contributions.

Kline says he corresponds about the program with about 20 in-house attorneys from companies including The Home Depot, Delta Air Lines, BellSouth Corp. and Bank of America Corp. "It seems to be a really exciting word-of-mouth in the community that's attracting interest almost without us even trying to generate it," he says.

Atlanta's Pro Bono Partnership will be its own 501(c)(3) entity, separate from the New York group, but Hobish says he will offer continued support if asked.

Kline says his group will continue to raise funds and meet monthly, and soon will hire an executive director. Kline hopes to open the doors to clients by late summer or early fall.

"It will involve as many in-house lawyers as possible and try and take maximum advantage of their in-house skill sets, which tend to be in transactional areas rather than litigation," says Kline. "There's the belief that we are a major headquarters town similar to New York. And as a major city, we too have a pretty significant need for pro bono services." □