



American Counsel Association - McDermott International Scholarship

By: Anna Chestnut

The McDermott International Scholarship provides the opportunity for a student, with their sights set on a career at the Bar, to spend two weeks with an American law firm. It is intended as a springboard to launch a legal career, with the insight gained from another common law jurisdiction. As the former president of the American Counsel Association, Gerard McDermott QC generously provides this scholarship.

The American Counsel Association is an independent organisation which connects American law firms for professional development. Increasingly, it is extending its membership internationally. It provides a forum for legal professionals to share ideas and work together.

What an honour it was to be chosen as the successful scholar.

I had the pleasure of spending two weeks in Illinois, learning about the state's legal profession-with one week spent in Peoria and a further week spent in Chicago. I was generously hosted by Heyl Royster. Specifically, working alongside Managing Partner Tim Bertschy was the grand prize. He shared with me a wealth of legal and professional experience, which was hugely beneficial. He is an excellent attorney and manager. His devotion to professional organisations is something I hope to emulate in my own legal career.

My trip included a wide variety of legal work experience. Time spent in the trial court, federal court, and the supreme court exposed me to the range of advocacy and court etiquette adopted in Illinois. I found the style of advocacy to be slightly more relaxed than England and Wales, which allowed the trial attorneys to be more creative in articulating their points.

A particular highlight was meeting with legal professionals and discussing the current obstacles which are faced by litigants. Similar to the United Kingdom, there is an increasing number of unrepresented litigants, referred to in the U.S. to as "pro se." The challenge, for lawyers, lies in demystifying the court process for such litigants. My pro bono day in Chicago included time spent with CARPLS (Coordinated Advice and Referral Program for Legal Services), PILI (Public Interest Law Initiative) and CEDL (Centre for Disability and Elder Law). It seems as though acronyms and access to justice go hand-in hand! The tireless effort of the individuals in these organisations reiterated to me the importance of pro bono. Some of these initiatives should definitely be emulated in the UK.

Witnessing the contrast between private practice and working in house was another learning opportunity. I spent time with Caterpillar and Morton Salts' in house counsel. These attorneys had to deal with a diverse range of legal questions. They also had to master the technical knowledge of their specific industry. I found this balancing act very impressive.

Other non-legal highlights included a trip to see the Chicago Cubs win against the Milwaukee Brewers and taking an architectural tour along the river.

The parallels between the UK and US justice systems were clear to see. I think we can work collaboratively to share ideas on the best way to deliver access to justice. My trip provided a fascinating insight to the modern challenges faced by legal professionals and allowed me to reflect on our own legal framework. A hugely enjoyable and useful experience.