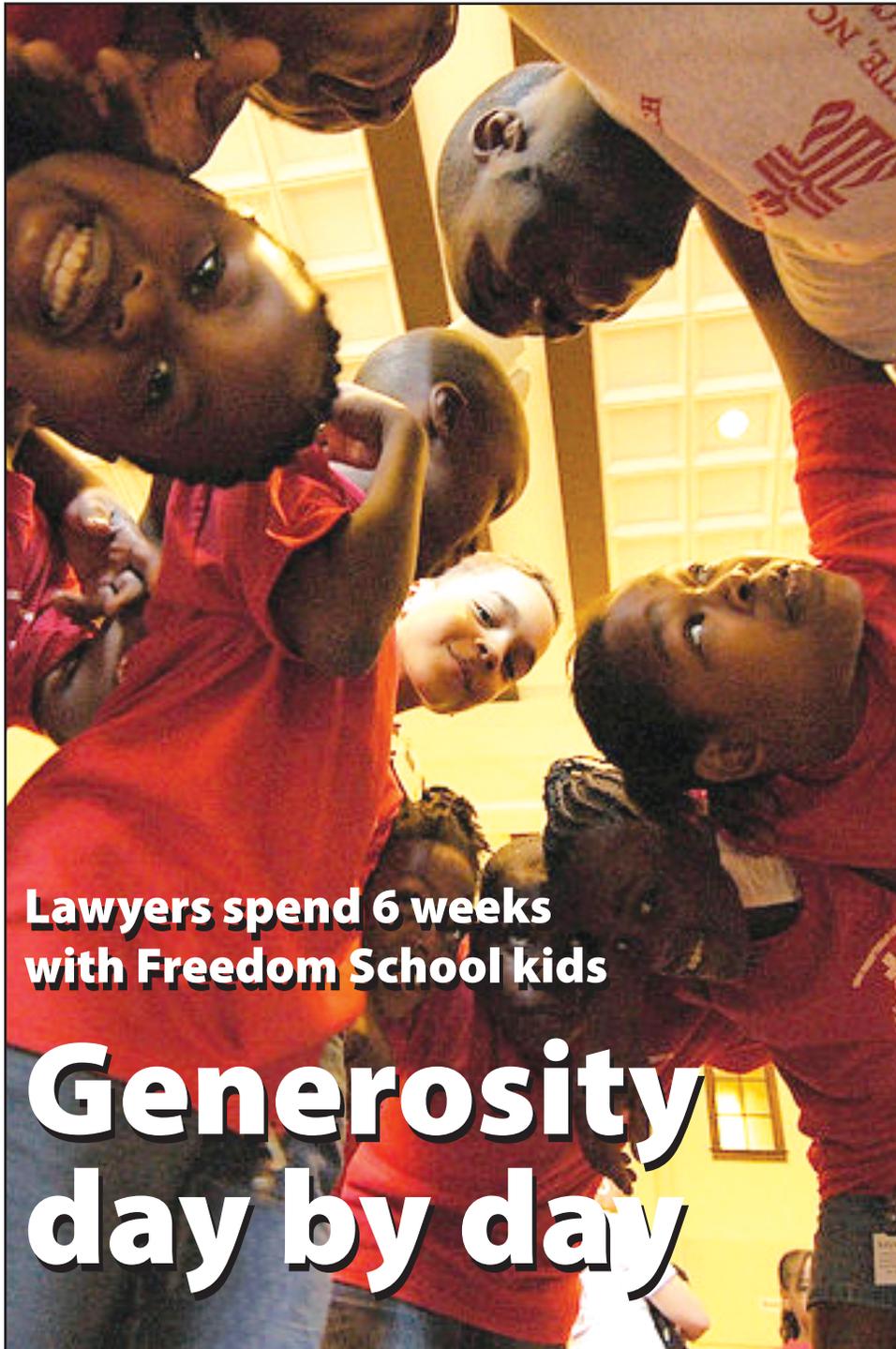


LAWYERS WEEKLY

<http://www.nclawyersweekly.com>

North Carolina Lawyers Weekly, September 1, 2008



**Lawyers spend 6 weeks
with Freedom School kids**

**Generosity
day by day**

Photo courtesy of Doug Pearson

By **DIANA SMITH**

Staff Writer

CHARLOTTE — What do you call a lawyer who spends a couple of hours of his work day tossing around water balloons?

A kid answer: A wet one.

The adult response: A generous one.

For six weeks this summer, about 40 attorneys from Robinson, Bradshaw & Hinson in Charlotte played hooky and cut loose from the office each weekday as volunteers with the Freedom School at Charlotte's First Presbyterian Church. The school, like others in Mecklenburg County and around the nation, provided after-school and summer enrichment programs for minority and low-income children.

The lawyers set up a rotation allowing each to keep up with the demands of practice while still spending up to three hours daily working with about 50 kids who ranged from kindergarteners to middle school students.

It was a welcome break from day-to-day legal work, lawyers said.

"Almost immediately after they volunteered, I heard positive feedback," said RBH attorney Jennifer Hutchens, who led the firm's effort to work with the school. "They really appreciated the chance to be able to break away from their busy day of document review or dealing with clients and just being a kid.

"You do learn a lot from kids. Often times in our day-to-day lives, we're so busy and caught up in our own element here at work that you lose track of that a little bit."

Freedom Schools help at-risk

■ Continued on back

■ Continued

students with schooling in math, reading and other subjects. Sponsored by the Children's Defense Fund, a private, nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C., they also focus on helping kids improve in areas such as health, nutrition, leadership development and civic engagement.

Hutchens estimated that RBH lawyers and summer associates spent 90 percent of their Freedom School time in classrooms.

But it wasn't all work and no play. Attorney Thomas Holderness can testify to that.

He's the guy who ended up with wet clothes on Field Day.

"I supervised the water balloon station. They had one of those wet sponge stations where you pass it over your head, under your legs ... it was field games on the front lawn all day long," he said.

"It was fun to see lawyers just out there playing," said Lauren Temm, site coordinator for the Freedom School.

"It shows the kids that they're regular people and, hopefully, inspires them to think, 'Hey, I can be a lawyer, too.'"

The attorneys also assisted with other parts of the curriculum, such as baking pretzels, creating arts and crafts and attending music and yoga classes with the kids.

Volunteering was less about kids recognizing RBH volunteers as lawyers and more about having fun and helping out, said David Kimball, an attorney who helped second-graders with reading.



**Jennifer
Hutchens**



**Thomas
Holderness**



**David
Kimball**

"I don't even think they knew I was a lawyer," he said. "When I was introduced as 'Mr. Kimball' or 'Mr. David,' they asked if I was the teacher's boyfriend."

Even moments of pathos had a heartwarming aspect. For Hutchens, the most rewarding part of the experience was seeing the teary-eyed faces of kids who were sad to leave on the last day of Freedom School.