

Meeting's aim: Make adults advocates of kids with disabilities

By Ellyce Field
Special to The Detroit News

Peter W. D. Wright is getting used to living out of a suitcase. These days, the trial lawyer, whose specialty is special education law, spends at least a third of the year on the road with his wife, Pamela, a psychotherapist. The Wrights crisscross the country leading conferences that help parents, educators, health care workers and lawyers learn how to advocate for children with disabilities within the educational system.

Since his defining moment in 1993 when he won the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case of *Florence County School District Four v. Carter*, extending the rights of learning-disabled children who wish to go to private school at public expense, Wright has become a champion of parent advocacy.

The husband-and-wife team offers a Web site with free materials and resources, including a Yellow Pages for Kids With Disabilities that lists information by state. They are also the co-authors of three books — "Wrightslaw: Special Education Law," "Wrightslaw: From Emotions to Advocacy" and "Wrightslaw: No Child Left Behind," which help parents maneuver

About the event

What: Wrightslaw Special Education Law Conference for Parents of Children with Disabilities. Sponsored by the Autism Society of America-Oakland County Chapter.

Where: Michigan State University Management Education Center, 811 W. Square Lake Road, Troy.

When: 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Sat.

Admission: \$85 includes two texts ("Wrightslaw: Special Education Law" and "Wrightslaw: From Emotions to Advocacy") plus handouts.

Information: Register at (248) 393-3131 or www.asaoakland.org.

For more advocacy resources and to book Peter and Pam Wright, visit www.wrightslaw.com.

through educational jargon, Individual Education Program meetings and special education law.

Peter and Pam Wright are the featured speakers at Saturday's Wrightslaw Special Education Law Conference for Parents of Children with Disabilities held at the Michigan State Management Education Center in Troy.

While sponsored by the Autism Society of America-Oakland County Chapter, Pete Wright explains that his conferences are the same, regardless of what disability a child has.

"Our conferences are not disability-specific, they focus instead on how parents can sell and market the needs of their children to the school district," he says. "Parents need to learn

how to get the adversary on the other side of the table to open their checkbook and give the student what he needs to learn."

According to Peter Wright, a good parent advocate is not one who can rattle off all the special education laws. Instead, it's a person who is prepared and friendly.

"Never let (the meeting) get adversarial," he says. "Parents need to be a combination of Mother Teresa and Miss Manners. And I suggest they bring food. All great salesmen bring food to a meeting."

Wright was written off by early teachers as someone who would never learn to read, let alone go to college.

"The teachers told my parents I



Peter and Pam Wright will lead the daylong Wrightslaw conference being held Saturday in Troy.

was emotionally disturbed and close to being mentally retarded," he says. "My parents put me through a comprehensive evaluation (I was diagnosed with dyslexia and ADHD) and then got me a one-on-one tutor every day after school for two years."

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