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Local News

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Making it easier for law students to work for 'greater good'

BY: [ARLENE FINE](#) Senior Staff Reporter

Incoming senior Daniel Leathers at Case Western Reserve School of Law could be a poster boy for the school's fledgling Center for Social Justice.



Daniel Leathers, center, assists Legal Aid clients with matters relating to their foreclosure.

This summer, the Pittsburgh native chose to accept a pro bono internship at Cleveland's Legal Aid Society. "At first I didn't think it would happen because I needed some financial assistance to help pay my bills in the fall," he says. Then he applied for a Center for Social Justice scholarship and received \$2,000, just enough to get by.

"Although I did not come close to earning the salaries of some of my classmates who interned at large law firms, the experience allowed me to make important contributions and led to a life-altering decision," explains Leathers, who is Jewish.

For the past three months Leathers has worked in Legal Aid's consumer law unit focusing on foreclosure cases. "It was incredibly rewarding for me to help so many people work their way out of their personal foreclosure crisis," he says. "Within a short time I was convinced I wanted to pursue a career in public service. Even though that field's not as lucrative as working for a corporation or a big firm, this is the area of law that excites me the most."

His experience also convinced Leathers to remain in Cleveland after graduation next May. He is registered to take the Ohio Bar and hopes to continue his work at Cleveland's Legal Aid Society.

It is for socially aware students like Leathers that Case's School of Law dean Gary Simson created the Center for Social Justice.

Shortly after he was named dean in July, 2006, Simson

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became aware of the law school's historic commitment to social justice and wanted to formally carry on that tradition.

He established the Center for Social Justice. The Center assists students financially who wish to pursue a career in social justice and encourages all students to devote some time to public interest work during and after law school, explains Simson. "If our students decide upon graduation to work for the government, the ACLU, Sierra Club, or Legal Aid Society, for example, the Center seeks to provide them with substantial loan repayment assistance every year they do public interest work."

Simson is a strong believer in law school students working for the greater good. "It is important to imbue students with the obligation to serve the public," he says. "They should regard doing pro bono work during and after law school as a natural and appropriate opportunity."

Simson is actively fundraising to build a significant endowment for the Center. His goal is an endowment of \$10 million, which will enable the Center to spend its income on summer fellowships, loan repayment assistance and scholarships without going into principal.

"With student, staff, board, alumni and political support this is not a pie-in-the-sky goal," he insists. "By focusing on social responsibility within Northeast Ohio and beyond, we are creating something everyone can rally around."

To help raise awareness and funds for the Center, a benefit concert featuring Richie Havens will be held on Fri., Sept. 5, at the Ohio Theatre. "Richie Havens is not only a great songwriter and performer, but also a longtime and vocal proponent for social justice," says Simson, who will be announcing two major gifts to the Center that evening. "I'm confident these gifts are just the beginning of our endowment goal."

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WHAT: Center for Social Justice Benefit

Concert featuring Richie Havens

WHEN: Fri., Sept. 5, at 8 p.m.

WHERE: Ohio Theatre, Playhouse Square

TICKETS: playhousesquare.org or 216-241-6000

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