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News

## Law firm contributes to civil law service (with video)

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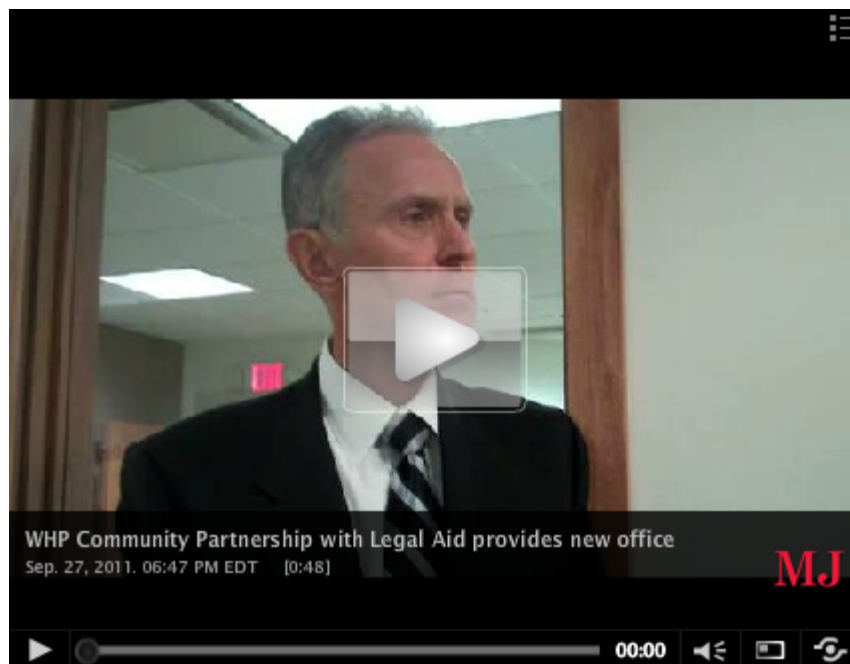
By KATE SNYDER

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**ELYRIA** — Rich Panza cannot think of a more worthy cause to contribute to than the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland.

Panza was one of the speakers at an open house hosted yesterday by the LAS office in Lorain County. The event was to both welcome the community to its new location 1530 West River Road, suite 301, Elyria, as well as honor the law firm that helped make the move possible — Wickens, Herzer, Panza, Cook and Batista.



The firm donated \$40,000 to the local LAS office, which went toward the relocation as well as continued support in the office.

“The lawyers here deserve all of it,” Panza said about the new space. “And the clients deserve it more.”

The Legal Aid provides civil law services to people living 125 percent below the federal poverty level, said Colleen Cotter, executive director of the LAS.

“These are folks who can hopefully make the rent, but they can’t afford an attorney,” she said.

Some of the legal services the office provides include foreclosures, bankruptcy, evictions, substandard housing conditions, exclusion from school, unemployment compensation and detention and deportation.

In 2010, Cotter said across the LAS's four locations in Lorain, Cuyahoga, Ashtabula and Lake counties, more than 100,000 people applied for help, and lawyers in the office as well as volunteer lawyers and law students were able to handle 11,000 cases, with 1,000 in Lorain County.

While the LAS doesn't have the resources to assist everyone, Cotter said, it tries to help as many as possible. Previously, the county's legal aid offices were on Broad Street in Elyria. Cotter said the new spot was more centrally located, making it easier for potential clients to access it.

"I couldn't be happier," she said about the move. "I'm absolutely thrilled."

Panza, also an LAS board member, said the move has been in the works for a few months. He was happy to have a part in helping the organization.

"They are the best at what they do," Panza said.

In addition to the donation from WHP, the Community Foundation of Lorain County presented a \$10,000 grant to the local LAS office. Cotter said it would go toward office operations.

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