

poetic justice

Volume 9
Issue 3
Fall 2012



U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder Is Keynote Speaker at Legal Aid's Annual Event

On September 28, 2012, nearly 1,000 members of the community gathered to support Legal Aid and hear keynote remarks by The Honorable Eric H. Holder, Jr., Attorney General of the United States. The event, held in the Renaissance Cleveland Hotel's Grand Ballroom, is Legal Aid's opportunity to highlight accomplishments of the past year. Attendees at the luncheon included legal professionals, members of the judiciary, civic leaders, and community partners.

The event featured the premiere of Legal Aid's new video, made with the help of Glazen Creative Studios. This video describes Legal Aid's work and will educate key constituents and community members about Legal Aid and its importance in Northeast Ohio.

former Congressman Louis Stokes (Squire Sanders (US) LLP). Adrian Thompson, current President of the Board and Partner at Taft/, spoke of their service to Legal Aid and how their work will pay dividends into the future. Mr. Thompson praised their "deep commitment, practical experience, wise counsel, and connections help make Legal Aid the model organization that it is."

Following a welcome by United States Attorney Steven Dettelbach, Attorney General Holder addressed the attendees and reiterated Legal's Aid viable presence in the justice system indicating that the organization "has been instrumental in improving lives and bringing positive change to communities across this city." He further emphasized how the work of Legal Aid acts as a "critical reinvestment in the community" and that he has great confidence in Legal Aid's ability to assist in closing the current "justice gap." He also affirmed that last year's accomplished work will serve "to build a more fair, more just, and more equitable society; and to expand the reach and impact of the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland."

Attorney General Holder also articulated that "...by offering valuable advice and representation for an individual facing a home foreclosure or a client facing a child custody hearing; by supporting victims of domestic violence or taking a stand against predatory and unfair lending practices, your volunteers and staff – with the generous support of the private bar – have made a life-changing – and sometimes, a life-saving – difference...This means that your work is more relevant – and more important – than ever." ●

United States Attorney General Eric Holder highlights the importance of Legal Aid in his keynote address.

Colleen Cotter, Legal Aid's Executive Director, highlighted the law's power to bring peace and hope to the lives of those most vulnerable who "know far too little of those sweet moments" of rights, dignity, and justice. These "words that bring peace" served as the theme of the event, which borrowed from the Buddha quote, "Better than a thousand hollow words... is one word that brings peace." Ms. Cotter's speech described how the work of Legal Aid strives to be the "pivot point" by helping clients who have been forced down destructive paths of hopelessness, empowering them to choose new paths of hope. Cotter emphasized, "When we use this power, we do more than solve a legal problem, we bring peace to our clients' lives."

The event also honored five attorneys who are retiring from Legal Aid's Board of Directors in 2012: Ilah Adkins (Charter One), Mark Bennett (United States Attorney's Office), Kathy Kordelseki (ABB, Inc.), Rich Panza (Wickens Herzer Panza Cook & Batista), and



Board President Adrian Thompson, Esq. addresses the crowd. Mr. Thompson is a partner at the law firm of Taft.



Legal Aid Executive Director Colleen Cotter (near right) with retiring Legal Aid attorney board members (l-r) former Congressman Louis Stokes (Squire Sanders (US) LLP), Mark Bennett (U.S. Attorney's Office), Rich Panza (Wickens Herzer Panza Cook & Batista), Kathy Kordelseki (ABB, Inc.), Ilah Adkins (Charter One).

Inside this Issue:

- **Baker Hostetler announces major support for Legal Aid**
- **Legal Aid and MetroHealth partnership thrives**
- **Legal Aid assists low-income U.S. Veterans**
- **Volunteer profiles and photos from Pro Bono Week and Legal Aid's Annual Meeting**

Fighting for Ohio's Veterans

Legal Aid joins local, state and national efforts to provide legal services to low-income veterans

Ohio is home to nearly 900,000 veterans, making it the sixth most veteran-populated state in the nation. The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland has always provided services to veterans. But, in 2012, the focus in veterans' issues became a fully-integrated part of Legal Aid's service delivery model.

Anne Sweeney, Managing Attorney for Community Engagement at Legal Aid, says Legal Aid's current work with veterans was prompted by a variety of other efforts. The first was the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Homeless Veterans Initiative, which dedicated \$800 million to prevent homelessness among veterans and re-introduced the importance of veterans programs on a national scale. Ann Porath, Legal Aid's Managing Attorney for the Volunteer Lawyers Program and Intake, cites the recognition of veterans issues as a priority by The Legal Services Corporation (LSC), which provides funding for legal aid providers nationally.

Additionally, The Ohio Military and Veterans Legal Assistance Program is a statewide effort led by Justice Evelyn L. Stratton of the Ohio Supreme Court. The program will function as a "statewide system of referrals that also works closely with legal aids, several law clinics, local *pro bono* efforts, bar associations and legal clinics." Ms. Porath said, "Under Justice Stratton's leadership, I am excited to think of how local and statewide efforts will develop and provide more services to our veterans."

Locally, Legal Aid worked with two Case Western Reserve University Law School students, who are also U.S. veterans. The students were "energized to provide more services to veterans through other law students, Legal Aid, private attorneys and local bar associations," said Ms. Porath.



Legal Aid attorney Camille Gill works with a U.S. veteran at a recent Brief Advice and Referral Clinic in Ashtabula County.

The conversations, said Ms. Sweeney, culminated in one question: "How do we make sure there are legal services for U.S. veterans?"

This question was the basis for the first Veterans Roundtable discussion in August, where nearly twenty veteran service provider representatives came together to learn about Legal Aid and talk about ways to enhance legal services for veterans in Northeast Ohio. Since the August roundtable, Legal Aid hosted two clinics focused on legal issues of U.S. veterans. More clinics are planned for 2013.

Joshua Collins, a Veteran Representative for The Ohio Department of Job & Family Services, said the effort is "an excellent resource to gain more knowledge of Legal Aid, their mission and how to best utilize their resources to help veterans."

Mr. Collins added, "I have had veterans get assistance for unemployment benefits, child support, and bankruptcy from Legal Aid. This assistance has helped them financially in the short-term as well as in the long run and put them on track until they were able to get back on their feet." ●

Make A Decision Today To Create a Better Tomorrow...

Create a better tomorrow by including
The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland in your estate plan.

Let Legal Aid know of your intentions,
and become a charter member of "THE 1905 SOCIETY."

To join, please contact M. Lindsay Marchio,
Legal Aid's Associate Director of Development,
at 216.861.5590 or lindsay.marchio@lasclev.org.

Are you a professional in the planned giving community?
Join Legal Aid's new Planned Giving Advisory Committee,
focused on planned giving and other allied professionals.

Sign up at www.lasclev.org/plannedgiving,
and watch for details about a special gathering in 2013.

WHAT DO YOU WANT
your legacy TO BE?

Legal Aid Celebrates 100 Years as a United Way Agency

In 2013, The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland will celebrate its 100th year as a United Way of Greater Cleveland partner agency. The Cleveland Federation for Charity and Philanthropy – the precursor to our modern United Way – selected Legal Aid as a charter member in 1913.

Legal Aid is grateful to receive grants and designations through United Way of Greater Cleveland, United Way of Ashtabula County and United Way of Greater Lorain County. These gifts have a positive impact on hundreds of low-income people in our community year round. ●



Volunteer Profile: *Annie L. Potter, Esq.*

This summer, many people took vacation time from work to travel or simply relax with friends and family, but Annie Potter was not one of them. She took a full week of vacation and spent it volunteering with Legal Aid's Health-Education-Work-Income-Immigration (HEWII) practice group.

Ms. Potter spent her week preparing for a Legal Aid Brief Advice and Referral Clinic dealing with expungement issues, a specialized clinic that allows individuals with misdemeanor convictions to apply to have their record sealed in order to obtain employment.

For the Expungement Clinics, Legal Aid prepares documentation for each client, and this is where Annie's "extreme dedication and commitment" became evident to Stephanie Jackson, Legal Aid's Managing Attorney for HEWII: "It seems trivial, but it is a critical part of the process that can be so time-consuming and Annie completes it in such volume and accurately."

Ms. Potter says, "I have always liked public interest law and volunteering with Legal Aid allows me to do something I have a personal interest in." However, she also sees the larger impact of giving her time: "[My employer] runs a grant program based on volunteer hours, but

since I have a set schedule, I can't commit to individual clients. By giving a week to help with even the smallest tasks, I was able to build up the hours to qualify for the program."

Ms. Jackson could not have appreciated the help more and looks forward to working with Annie on future projects, saying, "She is phenomenal; a committed volunteer and a beautiful person."

To learn more about volunteer opportunities at Legal Aid, visit: www.lasclev.org/volunteer ●



Annie Potter, Esq. (JP Morgan Chase Bank) and Stephanie Jackson, Esq. (Legal Aid)

Volunteer Profile: *Bob Mann, Esq.*

As of May 2012, one in every 495 housing units in Ohio had a foreclosure filing, giving the state one of the highest foreclosure rates in the nation. The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland processes intakes for hundreds of people in need of foreclosure help each year. Though Legal Aid lacks the resources to take all foreclosure cases brought to their attention, Legal Aid staff attorneys and *pro bono* volunteers work together to achieve a 76 percent success rate for the foreclosure cases Legal Aid does handle.

After retiring from a career with Progressive Insurance Company, Bob Mann called Legal Aid's Volunteer Lawyers Program in 2008 and offered his expertise. At the peak of the nation's housing crisis, Mr. Mann hoped he "could be some help" to the thousands of low-income families affected by foreclosures. Through 2012, Mr. Mann has handled 20 *pro bono* foreclosure cases referred from Legal Aid.

In a recent case, Mr. Mann successfully worked to avoid the foreclosure of Dan Williams' family home. The family had lived in the house for 21

years when they fell behind on the mortgage because Mr. Williams lost his job at the same time that his wife's income decreased significantly. This was all the more troubling because two of their children were attending college and Mr. Williams did not want to sacrifice his children's education.

When the Williams family was referred to him, Mr. Mann discovered the foreclosure complaint against Mr. Williams was filed incorrectly: The complaint did not include a mortgage payment that was made directly to the bank. The case was dismissed because of this error. Thanks to Mr. Mann's keen eye for detail and passion for justice, Mr. Williams and his family could remain in their home.

Mr. Mann is passionate about his work and worries that foreclosure complaints are regularly filed without proper documentation. Mr. Mann promises to continue fighting for the Williams family and other low-income clients who face foreclosure.

Join Mr. Mann and volunteer for Legal Aid. Visit www.lasclev.org/volunteer to learn more about volunteer opportunities, or email probono@lasclev.org ●

* client named changed to protect confidences

Board Member Profile: *Tim Walters*

Tim Walters is a Community Representative on The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland Board of Directors, nominated by Merrick House. After having spent most of his life involved in community advocacy, Tim has brought a wealth of experience with him to the Legal Aid's leadership, and he currently chairs Legal Aid's committee to review grievances from clients.



Tim Walters

Tim believes that his experience on Legal Aid's Board of Directors is a great learning experience that keeps him continually engaged. He is appreciative of how Community Representatives have gained a greater voice in both the operation and the budget priorities of the organization. Thomas Mlakar, Legal Aid's Deputy Director for Advocacy, works closely with Tim and feels fortunate to have his advice and counsel, "Tim is a tremendous leader, in every sense of the word. He brings a wealth of experience with him, and he's not afraid to be direct. We are lucky to have him."

Tim feels it is significant for everyone to realize that the mission and the needs on the ground far exceed the budgets. He thinks that no one should be left without access to justice, and that securing it should be important to everyone in society, not just those involved at Legal Aid. ●



Legal Aid's Volunteer Lawyers Program

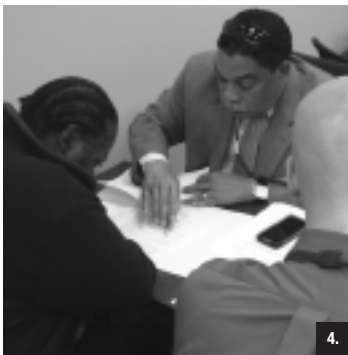
Photos from recent clinics and 2012 Celebrate *Pro Bono* Week:
THANK YOU to the 1,600+ *pro bono* volunteers who help Legal Aid clients each year!



1. Michael Rose, Esq. (Federal Trade Commission)



2. Legal Aid Board Vice President Ann Bergen, Esq. with Geauga County Prosecutor Jim Flaiz, Esq. 3. Attorney-volunteers from the Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association's Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts at a Legal Aid clinic at El Barrio in the Detroit Shoreway neighborhood.



4. Earl Williams, Esq. (Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority)



5. Ellen Keller, Esq. (private practice)



6. Andy Seger, Esq. (Janik LLP)



7. John Slagter, Esq. (Buckingham, Doolittle & Burroughs LLP)



8. Julian Emerson, Esq. (Reminger)



9. Tom Mlakar, Esq. (Legal Aid), Judge David Fuhry (Gauga County Common Pleas Court) and Judge Mary Jane Trapp (Ohio Court of Appeals)



10. Attorney-volunteers from Medical Mutual of Ohio and the law firm of Calfee. 11. Attorney-volunteers from Developers Diversified Realty and Jones Day at a Legal Aid clinic at Neighborhood Housing Services in the Slavic Village neighborhood.



Legal Aid Board of Directors

Ilah M. Adkins, Esq.
Charter One Bank

Mark S. Bennett, Esq.
U.S. Attorney's Office

Ann S. Bergen, Esq.
Law Offices of Ann S. Bergen, Co. LPA

Carolyn Dennis
Community Representative
nominated by JFK Recreation Center

Frank R. DeSantis, Esq.
Thompson Hine LLP

Karen Giffen, Esq.
Giffen & Kaminski

Vanetta J. Jamison
Community Representative
nominated by Beech Brook

Kathleen M. Kordeleski, Esq.
ABB, Inc.

Barbara Leadbetter
Community Representative
nominated by MetroHealth's Center for Community Health

John Q. Lewis, Esq.
Tucker, Ellis & West LLP

Heather Nicastro
Community Representative
nominated by The Arc of Greater Cleveland

Richard Panza, Esq.
Wickens, Herzer, Panza, Cook & Batista

Richard D. Petruilis, Esq.
KeyBank National Association

Betsy Rader, Esq.
Cleveland Clinic Foundation

Rebecca Ruppert McMahon, Esq.
Cuyahoga Community College

Congressman Louis Stokes, Esq.
Squire, Sanders & Dempsey LLP

Adrian D. Thompson, Esq.
Taft/

Tim Walters
Community Representative
nominated by Merrick House

Michelle Wilkerson-Guerry
Community Representative
nominated by the NEO Coalition for the Homeless

Ida R. Williams
Community Representative
nominated by the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Lorain County

Rebecca L. Wojtko
Community Representative
nominated by the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Lorain County

Executive Team

Colleen M. Cotter, Esq.
Executive Director

Tom Mlakar, Esq.
Deputy Director for Advocacy

Bettina Kaplan
Director of Finance and Administrative Operations

Kathryn Ingersoll
Executive Assistant

Melanie A. Shakarian, Esq.
Director of Development and Communications

Newsletter Staff

Jordan Doll
Adrienne Fischer
Matt Henderson
Lindsay Marchio
Contributors

Melanie A. Shakarian, Esq.
Editor

Art Direction & Design

Sharon Baden
Baden Design, Cleveland

Photography

Nannette Bedway
Legal Aid Archives

Baker Hostetler Announces Support for Legal Aid

Legal Aid and Baker Hostetler are working together to ensure children have access to school, since we all know education is a pathway out of poverty. The law firm of Baker Hostetler recently announced a four-year \$120,000 grant to Legal Aid, focused on Legal Aid's education law work. Hewitt Shaw, managing partner of the firm's Cleveland office, says, "We are pleased to be able to support this important organization."



Baker Hostetler has a deep and long history with Legal Aid. Newton D. Baker was among the founding leaders of Legal Aid in 1905. Numerous Baker Hostetler attorneys have served on Legal Aid's board of directors over the past 100 years. Hundreds of Baker Hostetler attorneys have provided pro bono services to Legal Aid's clients.

Make your support known to Legal Aid in 2012!
Visit www.lasclev.org/donate

Staff Profile: *Dennis Dobos, Esq.*

The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland is proud to count among its staff Dennis Dobos, a respected and highly successful attorney in the Consumer Law Practice Group. For fifteen years, Mr. Dobos has represented underprivileged and vulnerable clients in situations ranging from foreclosures and landlord-tenant disputes, to unfair business practices involving breaches of contract, fraud, misrepresentation, and violations of the consumer protection statutes. Dennis notes that "law school was a way I could learn to be of service to others – this is what life is all about." With that service in mind, he joined Legal Aid in 1997.



Dennis Dobos, Esq.

In the time Dennis has worked at Legal Aid, he has worked on almost 1300 cases with a stellar 98% of his clients receiving a positive outcome. The success that Mr. Dobos has experienced is a source of pride and his motivation to continue to secure justice for those he helps. Since the foreclosure crisis hit Northeast Ohio, he has focused almost exclusively on foreclosure cases. In the last year, 56 out of 60 homes have been saved, and in the previous six years, Mr. Dobos has won 32 out of the 34 of the jury trials he litigated. During his tenure at Legal Aid, he has protected the rights and property of homeowners and tenants, fought unscrupulous lenders, wiped out well over a million dollars worth of debt, and negotiated innumerable cash settlements for his clients.

Legal Aid and MetroHealth Partnership Continues to Thrive

Through the innovative Community Advocacy Program (CAP) collaboration between Legal Aid and the MetroHealth System, attorneys from Legal Aid provide legal services to MetroHealth patients. The focus is on particular vulnerable populations, including children, pregnant women, re-entering prisoners, older adults and those with limited English proficiency.

The referral process at MetroHealth is key to the program's success. Megan Sprecher, the lead Legal Aid attorney with the CAP program, spoke about these critical referrals and how the program relies upon advocates in the community such as Oscar Gumucio, PhD, of MetroHealth's Division of Health Services for Hispanic Children and Adolescents. She states, "Dr. Gumucio is a tireless advocate for Latino children and parents and an invaluable partner. Dr. Gumucio understands that making a child healthy goes beyond what happens in the medical examining room. He makes Cleveland's Latino children healthier with a

holistic approach, advocating for the child's education, housing, and social needs. Legal Aid is lucky to have such a passionate strong partner."

Dr. Gumucio recently referred Susan Warner* to Legal Aid: Ms. Warner had tried twice to obtain Social Security disability (SSI) benefits for her daughter, Ashley, but failed. Young Ashley is a smart, vivacious 5-year-old. She was doing well academically in kindergarten, but had a debilitating seizure that changed everything. Ashley was diagnosed as epileptic and has experienced significant developmental delays as a result of her epilepsy. Because of these delays, Ashley repeated kindergarten for a second time and now must attend school with a nurse because of her medical condition.

Legal Aid helped Ms. Warner and now the family receives ongoing, monthly SSI benefits to help cover the costs of Ashley's care. The family also received a significant back payment of disability benefits. Today, Ashley's epilepsy is well-controlled through medication and additional SSI benefits will help her obtain further help including regular counseling and speech therapy so that she can continue to find success in school and have a bright future.

The Legal Aid and MetroHealth partnership was funded in 2012 by the law firms of Thompson Hine and Benesch, along with foundation funding from the Saint Luke's Foundation of Cleveland, George Gund Foundation, Third Federal Foundation, Kaiser Permanente of Ohio, Medical Mutual of Ohio Charitable Foundation, Frank Hadley Ginn and Cornelia Root Ginn Charitable Foundation, and RPM International Inc.



Dr. Oscar Gumucio and Legal Aid attorney Megan Sprecher

* Client name changed to protect privacy.



The
Legal Aid Society
of Cleveland

The Annual Campaign for Legal Aid

1223 West Sixth Street
Cleveland, Ohio 44113

Non Profit
U.S. Postage
PAID
Cleveland, Ohio
Permit No. 104

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

For more information about
The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland

www.lasclev.org

or call

216.861.5217

Stories of philanthropy and hope from The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland

6 | poeticjustice Fall 2012

Photos from Recent Legal Aid Events



Legal Aid

Our Mission

To secure justice and resolve fundamental problems for those who are low-income and vulnerable by providing high quality legal services and working for systemic solutions.

Need to Call Legal Aid?

Intake for New Clients

Phone: 216-687-1900

Phone (toll free): 888-817-3777

Cleveland, Elyria, Jefferson and Painesville Offices

Phone (toll free): 888-808-2800

Development & Communications Office

Phone: 216-861-5217

