



# POETIC JUSTICE

VOLUME 12 ISSUE 3 FALL '15

STORIES OF PHILANTHROPY AND HOPE FROM THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY OF CLEVELAND

## LEGAL AID GETS A FAIR DEAL FOR GARDENER DISPLACED BY HIGHWAY PROJECT



Joyce Hairston with her Legal Aid attorneys Tom Mlakar (left) and Paul Binder.

Joyce Hairston, an avid gardener, created The Union Community Garden in Slavic Village, fostering friendships and teaching neighbors to grow their own food. She had lived in her home for 16 years.

But this year came the bulldozers. They were clearing the way for Cleveland's new Opportunity Corridor boulevard which will link I-490 and University Circle. Ms. Hairston's home and garden had to go.

At first, the 60-year-old didn't want to move. She learned she was legally entitled to relocation assistance – but without an attorney, she didn't know what to do, and was worried she wouldn't get the compensation she deserved.

Legal Aid has advised a number of residents whose property is slated to be taken by eminent domain for the new road. "With the right settlement, it can be advantageous," says Paul Binder, a Legal Aid volunteer on the project, "but the negotiations can be complicated."

The negotiations were complicated for Ms. Hairston. The Ohio Department of Transportation found Ms. Hairston what they said was a "comparable" new home. But it was far away, had no room for a garden, and the taxes were impossible.

"I've been gardening it since 1995 – corn, greens, tomatoes, berries and some of those take time to cultivate. Virgin ground doesn't grow good vegetables, it has to take off," said Ms. Hairston. The state acted as if her demonstration garden was just a few flowerpots. Mr. Binder was able to show the demonstration garden was part of the High Tunnel Initiative, one of many urban gardens sponsored by the USDA and Rep. Marcia Fudge to encourage locally grown produce.

Legal Aid stepped in and convinced ODOT that a "comparable home" included a "comparable" garden. The property taxes on the new home ODOT found were closer to what she had been paying in Cleveland, and in a better location. Plus – it had room for a garden.

Thanks to her Legal Aid lawyer, she was able to appeal the first offer and she had enough money to buy a new home with a garden – plus moving expenses.

Ms. Hairston is thrilled, "Mr. Binder just grabbed it like a bulldog. In his calm way he was vicious."



Joyce Hairston in her garden with friends.

**WITHOUT AN ATTORNEY, SHE WOULDN'T HAVE GOTTEN THE COMPENSATION SHE DESERVED.**

**DID YOU MAKE YOUR GIFT YET TO LEGAL AID IN 2015?**

VISIT [WWW.LASCLEV.ORG/DONATE](http://WWW.LASCLEV.ORG/DONATE) TO MAKE A GIFT, OR USE THE ENVELOPE INSIDE THIS ISSUE – PLEASE REPLY BY DECEMBER 31.



## BARBARA BOYD IS HAPPY TO BE BACK AT WORK



A home health aide of 25 years keeps her job

Barbara Boyd was employed at a home health company since 1989. After nearly 25 years working as a home health aide, she was fired because she asked to extend her vacation by three days so she could attend the funeral of her aunt, the woman who helped raise her.

She attended the funeral and was fired when she tried to return to work.

Then, she was denied unemployment benefits. She did not have a history of disciplinary actions or taking unauthorized time-off. She filed an appeal and the claims examiner found it unreasonable to terminate her under the circumstances of attending a family funeral. Ms. Boyd was relieved to have benefits to tide her over until she could find a new job. Then, her employer appealed the decision. The case was scheduled for a hearing.

Ms. Boyd came to Legal Aid for help and Senior Attorney Anita Myerson took the case and carefully reviewed the documents that her employer had supplied, including the employer's notice of appeal. Ms. Myerson noticed it said the employer would appeal the decision or Ms. Fitzgerald could "come to the office and update her file and return to work."

Ms. Myerson advised her that might mean she could ask for her job back. She called her employer and was back on the schedule. An untrained person might have missed that clause.



Removing barriers to employment is an important part of Legal Aid's work. Partnerships like the one Legal Aid has with

the Deaconess Foundation help Legal Aid attorneys navigate barriers to employment and clear a path to economic stability for low-income clients.

To learn more, visit: [www.lasclev.org/get-help/work](http://www.lasclev.org/get-help/work)

## GRANDMOTHER GETS LAWYER'S HELP TO END ABUSE



Davida Dodson, Esq.

Olivia Stewart\* had been in an abusive relationship since high school. Her husband of more than 20 years had a good job – and a bad drug habit. The threats started with her husband saying he was going to kill her or shoot the dog. He began a campaign of intimidation, stealing things from the house, vandalizing her car, and sending vulgar text messages. Ms. Stewart knew he owned guns and she was afraid.

Then, he removed her from his medical insurance although she has a chronic disease. She had no money to pay the rent or bills and she knew she needed help. Legal Aid attorney Davida Dodson took her case and helped her get a divorce and get her finances in order.

### HE THREATENED HER... AND HER DOG.

Ms. Stewart was awarded spousal support for 12 years – plus nearly \$50,000 as a share of her now ex-husband's retirement benefits.

Ms. Dodson was concerned about her client's health issues and got Legal Aid's social worker involved to help her manage her symptoms. Ms. Dodson recruited the expertise of other Legal Aid attorneys to get her client out of a predatory car loan. And when her ex-husband tried to cash his income tax refund check before the divorce, Legal Aid's tax attorneys cried foul.

Olivia Stewart was dealt a bad hand, but she is thankful for her Legal Aid team. "I think of Davida and the Jefferson staff quite often. They were all very good to me," she says.

\*name changed to protect client privacy.

Special thanks to United Way of Ashtabula and the Ashtabula Foundation for supporting Legal Aid's work on cases like this in Ashtabula County!

## ACT 2 PROGRAM HONORED LOCALLY AND NATIONALLY



The Encore Prize presentation, from left: Ronn Richard and Bob Eckardt of the Cleveland Foundation with Colleen Cotter, Esq. – Legal Aid’s Executive Director, and Pat Haggerty, Esq. – member of Legal Aid’s Board of Directors.

Lots of notice has been given to Legal Aid’s ACT 2 program in recent months. The national **Legal Services Corporation** (LSC) announced a **Pro Bono Innovation Grant** for ACT 2. Additionally, **The Cleveland Foundation’s** inaugural **Encore Cleveland Prize** was awarded to ACT 2. Together, these awards provide more than \$240,000 in funding for this important effort.

LSC announced in September only 15 grants nationwide to support innovations in *pro bono* legal services for low-income clients. Legal Aid’s ACT 2 program was

selected along with other projects that creatively engage and recruit *pro bono* lawyers and other volunteers to leverage LSC’s federal funding and increase the resources available to low-income clients.

“The grants we are funding will expand the resources available to serve low-income people and engage more private lawyers and law students in rewarding *pro bono* work,” said LSC President Jim Sandman.

The Cleveland Foundation’s Encore Cleveland Prize was presented to Legal Aid because of how Legal Aid deploys late-career and retired volunteer lawyers into the community to address the legal needs of low-income community members.

Cleveland Foundation President & CEO Ronn Richard and Executive Vice President Bob Eckardt presented the Encore Cleveland Prizes during BVU’s Purpose@50Plus event at the Cleveland Botanical Garden in October. “Our inaugural Encore Cleveland prize winners exemplify the positive impact possible when experienced Clevelanders

focus their talents on improving our community,” said Richard.

The Encore movement is a national effort to leverage the energy and experience of Americans who seek to fill community needs upon retirement or near the end of their primary careers. Encore Cleveland, launched in 2013 by the Cleveland Foundation, helps to connect and fund a network of organizations to provide experienced Greater Clevelanders age 50 and older with an array of meaningful opportunities in the community.

**Are you a late-career or retired attorney and want to get involved? Visit [www.lasclev.org/ACT2](http://www.lasclev.org/ACT2) to learn more today!**



## MALTZ MUSEUM RECEPTION HONORS DONORS



the Cleveland Institute of Music, played one of the restored violins in a touching performance.

On October 15, Legal Aid held a private reception at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage to recognize significant donors who pursue justice by supporting Legal Aid. The visit to the museum was coordinated with the special “Violins of Hope” exhibit. Docents were available so attendees could experience these painstakingly restored instruments which serve as testaments to the resilience of the human spirit, the power of music, and a reminder that we should all pursue justice. Rebecca Benjamin, a violinist from



S. Lee Kohrman, Esq.

At the event, S. Lee Kohrman received a special plaque in recognition of his ongoing support for Legal Aid and for his personal commitment to justice over his career. Kohrman remarked it was fitting to receive an award engraved “Justice, Justice shall you pursue,” a quote from Deuteronomy, at the Maltz Museum because of the connection between the Jewish community’s efforts to level the playing field and end poverty and Legal Aid’s work providing access to justice. **Join Legal Aid in pursuing justice – give today at [www.lasclev.org/donate!](http://www.lasclev.org/donate!)**

2015

VOLUNTEER  
RECOGNITION

AWARDS  
ANNOUNCED

The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland cannot assist its many clients without relying on the great work of its volunteers. Last year, 20% of the people helped by Legal Aid were assisted by a *pro bono* attorney.

**Legal Aid's Volunteer Lawyers Program** is proud to announce its 2015 volunteer recognition award winners.

**CONGRATULATIONS TO:**

**LEGACY OF JUSTICE AWARD WINNERS**

*In recognition of individual(s) whose participation in pro bono or other volunteer efforts has been significant in terms of length and/or impact.*

**James E. Young** in recognition for a lifetime of dedication and support of *pro bono* efforts which began as an attorney at Jones Day and continues in his retirement.

**KeyCorp** in recognition of its organizational involvement through the volunteer efforts of its attorneys and staff in both *pro bono* efforts and other critical support of Legal Aid

**ACCESS TO JUSTICE AWARD WINNERS**

*In recognition of significant contribution to advancing the mission of the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland through pro bono commitment.*

**John C. Allerding** (Thompson Hine, LLP)

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**John W. Shryock** (Shryock, Crook & Associates LLP)

**Nicole K. Wilson**

**COMMUNITY IMPACT AWARD WINNERS**

In recognition of *pro bono* efforts that address the needs of specific community of clients.

**Paul L. Binder**

**R. Jeffrey Pollock**

**Sandra L. Walker**

The winners were recognized at Legal Aid's Annual Luncheon and Report to the Community on November 30, 2015.

*Inspired by these volunteers? Become a volunteer today – [www.lasclev.org/volunteer](http://www.lasclev.org/volunteer).*

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Attorneys from Eaton Corporation and Squire Patton Boggs volunteer at the Memorial-Nottingham Branch of the Cleveland Library.



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# NEWS @ LEGAL AID



The Terminal Tower was lit blue to honor the American Bar Association's National Pro Bono Week.

On October 26 – everyone in the city could see the legal community's commitment to Legal Aid: the **Terminal Tower was lit blue to honor the American Bar Association's National Pro Bono Week**. This special week honors the work of pro bono volunteers nationwide. In Northeast Ohio, the celebration includes Legal Aid, numerous bar associations, the judiciary, community based organizations and volunteer attorneys.

**Crain's Cleveland Business** recognized Legal Aid's executive director Colleen Cotter as a finalist for the 2015 Crain's General & In-House Counsel Awards.

**Colleen Cotter** was invited to address the **American Academy of Arts & Sciences** at a meeting in Cambridge, Massachusetts, focused on "Making Justice Accessible."



Katherine Barr Hollingsworth, Esq.

Congratulations to **Katherine Barr Hollingsworth**, who was promoted to Managing Attorney of Legal Aid's Consumer Practice Group. Ms. Hollingsworth is a graduate of Middlebury College and the Georgetown University Law Center.

Legal Aid welcomed new staff members this fall, **Callie Dendrin** – a staff attorney in the Housing Law Practice Group, **David Johnson** - the Grants Administrator/Data Analyst, and **Danielle Gadomski Littleton** – a staff attorney in the Community Advocacy Program. Ms. Gadomski Littleton was previously an **Equal Justice Works Fellow** at Legal Aid.

Supervising attorney **Katie Feldman** was published in **Clearinghouse Community** in August. Her article focused on medical-legal partnerships. Clearinghouse Community is a peer-edited publication featuring practice resources for the nationwide legal aid community.

The **ABA Journal** featured a story about the unique "Law and the Library" partnership between the **Cleveland Public Library** and Legal Aid. Read the full story at [www.lasclev.org/09092015](http://www.lasclev.org/09092015)



Maria Smith, Esq.

Legal Aid attorney **Maria Smith** was awarded the 2015 Community Service Award from the **Cleveland Clinic's Lutheran Hospital**.

Legal Aid attorney **Deborah Dallmann** and staff members **Adrienne Fischer** and **Erica Thomas** were named as the 2015 Claude E. Clarke Award winners. Established in 1967, the Award recognizes outstanding service through professional performance and commitment to Legal Aid and its clients.



Anita Myerson, Esq.

Legal Aid senior attorney **Anita Myerson** is the winner of Legal Aid's 2015 Lifetime Achievement Award. Ms. Myerson joined the Legal Aid staff in 1981 as a Reginald Heber Smith Fellow. She soon developed expertise in the Unemployment Compensation (UC) system, an important safety net program for Ohioans governed by a complex set of rules. She has represented thousands of clients in her 34 years at Legal Aid.

She has also engaged in local and statewide advocacy and litigation aimed at ensuring that the UC system is operated in a fair manner, complies with federal law, and is designed to support workers who find themselves between jobs. She is a local, state and national leader in this practice area, and she has trained dozens of legal aid lawyers. Her reputation is such that she is often able to bring about change simply by presenting her well-researched and persuasive arguments.

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ARE YOU?  
HELP SHARE  
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