



POETIC JUSTICE

VOLUME 14 ISSUE 2 SUMMER/FALL '17

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



SPANISH-SPEAKING ATTORNEYS HELP DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVOR FEEL SAFE AFTER DISTRESSING EXPERIENCE

Isabel Ramirez Blancas, a survivor of domestic violence, says she's grateful for Legal Aid's help securing her residency status. "Now I'm not afraid to walk down the street to the park with my son," she said.

Isabel Ramirez Blancas left her home in Mexico for a new life in the United States, where she thought her U.S. citizen husband would petition for her residency status. But instead, he gave her a false ID card and forced her to work.

Compounding her disappointment, Ms. Ramirez suffered domestic violence at home. She never reported her situation because she was afraid to go to the police. Instead, Ms. Ramirez endured her husband's abuse until the day she came home to find he had taken his own life.

With no husband, no income to support the couple's young son, no documented status, and little English language ability, Ms. Ramirez was emotionally distraught. Her provider at MetroHealth's McCafferty Clinic referred her to Legal Aid, where she met a Spanish-speaking staff attorney.

"I was very happy to come across a lawyer that spoke Spanish," Ms. Ramirez said. "It made me feel I could trust her and the organization to do good work on my behalf."

The Legal Aid attorney found that Ms. Ramirez was eligible to self-petition for legal permanent residency under the Violence Against Women Act, and helped her begin the process.

Immigration cases often span many years, and Ms. Ramirez's was no exception. Initially, the petition was denied in 2013 because her abuser was no longer living, but Legal Aid helped her appeal the decision. After the appeal was granted on the self-petition, Legal Aid attorney Agustin Ponce de León filed for Ms. Ramirez's adjustment of status and work authorization.

Three years after Ms. Ramirez first filed, the government approved all her petitions, giving her lawful permanent residency and work authorization. Mr. Ponce de León personally delivered her green card to her door.

As for Ms. Ramirez, she is working on her English via a course, and she and her son are setting down roots in the only hometown her son has ever known.



Agustin Ponce de León, Esq.

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REHABILITATED WEST PARK HOME AT CENTER OF UNUSUAL CASE

Legal Aid volunteer attorney secures shelter



First-time homebuyer Nicole Parobek had spent all her savings and six months of sweat equity to rehabilitate her new home. Only after she and her boyfriend had substantially increased its value did a creditor claim a \$31,800 lien, threatening foreclosure if they didn't pay.

When the attorney she hired for the sale refused to talk to her, Ms. Parobek sought help from Legal Aid, where Mark Wallach, a Thacker Robinson Zinz attorney, took her case *pro bono*.

"I'm sort of the specialist in off-the-wall cases," Mr. Wallach said of his reputation with Legal Aid's Volunteer Lawyers Program. "I like to be able to take a complicated situation and straighten it out."

The case was unusual for a number of reasons: "Usually people take out a mortgage, and banks require them to buy title insurance, which includes a title search," Mr. Wallach said. "But here, she was buying the house outright for such a small amount of money."

To Ms. Parobek's credit, she kept meticulous records of all the work she had done. She also made a prescient move during the sale by

obtaining a signed, notarized document declaring the home free of liens. Mr. Wallach suspected malpractice, but when the estate attorney indignantly refused to contact his malpractice carrier, Mr. Wallach filed a claim against him.

"That got his attention," Mr. Wallach said. "His insurance carrier hired counsel to represent him, and that attorney reached a settlement with the creditor's attorney where the malpractice carrier would pay... and Nicole wouldn't have to pay anything."

Ms. Parobek's victory shows that justice could be won through her own record-keeping and persistence, combined with the prowess and willingness of her Legal Aid volunteer attorney.

"They get to keep their house and nobody is going to bother them," Mr. Wallach said. "It was a sad story with a happy ending."

Want to be a hero like Attorney Wallach? Join Legal Aid's Volunteer Lawyers Program by calling Ann McGowan Porath, Esq. at 216-861-5332. Read more about Ms. Parobek's story and make a gift to Legal Aid at www.lasclev.org.



Mark Wallach, Esq.

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2017 JAM FOR JUSTICE

Cleveland-area judges and attorney-rockers took the stage Wednesday, July 12 at "Jam for Justice," an annual fundraiser for Legal Aid that raised nearly \$100,000. The event, which drew roughly 1,000 people, was held at Aloft Hotel and the Ernst & Young courtyard and featured *pro bono* performances from a local DJ and five bands spanning the decades and musical genres. Lago Custom Events provided the catering.

- **Faith & Whiskey** played classic and punk dance tunes from the 70s and 80s, and featured Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Judge Mike Donnelly, Steve Zashin and Rich Wesorick and other local musician/professionals.
- **Luke Lindberg and the Hung Jury** with Ryan Kennedy and Bob Walker, covered acoustic and folk rock.

- **The No Name Band** played Motown, American rock and British invasion music with an all-lawyer line-up of Peter Brodhead, Steve Daniels, Toni Gideon, Hugh McKay, Doug McWilliams, Judge K.J. Montgomery, Jim Robenalt, Steven Shafron, Randy Solomon, Kris Treu, and Bob Walker.
- **Out of Order** spotlighted attorneys Vince Ruffa, Joe Grandinetti, and Marcus Sidoti, playing music like Black Keys, Green Day, and Kings of Leon.
- Newthisyear: **SIX sometimes SEVEN** included attorney Paul Grieco and several area professionals, playing classic rock.
- Brad Wolfe, an attorney at Friedman & Nemecek and owner of **DJ Wolfe Entertainment**, hosted the show.



1. Faith & Whiskey
2. Guests enjoy live music and drinks.
3. The No Name Band
4. Luke Lindberg
5. The Ernst & Young courtyard
6. Guests sample Lago Custom Event appetizers.
7. SIX sometimes SEVEN makes their Jam debut.
8. Jerry Porath with spouse
9. Out of Order
10. Brad "DJ" Wolfe

LORAIN ATTORNEYS STAFF MONTHLY CLINIC,
GAIN INSIGHTS OUTSIDE THEIR DAY JOB NICHE



Matt Dooley, Esq.

Members of the Lorain County Bar Association have stepped up to offer free legal advice to those in need.

Matt Dooley’s first time volunteering at Legal Aid’s monthly legal advice clinic at Oberlin Community Services led him into experiences he doesn’t normally get in his day job as partner at O’Toole, McLaughlin, Dooley, & Pecora. First, Mr. Dooley primarily deals with class action suits and other federal cases, but his *pro bono* work now might bring him to small claims court.

“WOULD I DO IT AGAIN? Absolutely. And I’ve been encouraging other attorneys to volunteer as well.”

– Matt Dooley, Esq.

Attorney Nikki Burns Dertouzos has also gained insights into new legal areas through volunteering with the Lorain clinic and in her role as outreach coordinator with the Lorain County Reentry Coalition.

“There are definitely some things that are not my niche, like foreclosure and bankruptcy,” Ms. Burns Dertouzos said, “But Legal Aid provides such good support and advice, I don’t ever hesitate to undertake the conversations outside my expertise.”

For Mr. Dooley, one recent *pro bono* experience involved reaching a settlement where his client paid a lesser amount, which she could afford. Mr. Dooley said in retrospect, “Would I do it again? Absolutely. And I’ve been encouraging other attorneys to volunteer as well.”

What:

Free Legal Advice Clinic with emphasis on consumer, foreclosure, family law, housing cases and other civil legal matters

When:

2:00 – 3:30 p.m., the second Tuesday of every month

Where:

The Oberlin Depot, 240 South Main Street, Oberlin, OH44074 United States

Get Involved:

Attorneys are welcome to volunteer their skills and time, and students are encouraged to help with clinic intakes. Contact the Lorain County Bar Association at (440) 323-8416, or Legal Aid Volunteer Lawyers Program at www.lasclev.org/volunteer, or Oberlin Community Services at (440) 774-6579.

Thanks TO BAKERHOSTETLER!
Firm concludes multi-year grant of \$120,000, helps Legal Aid expand education law practice

BakerHostetler’s strong support over the last four years enabled Legal Aid to grow its education law practice and impact 3,000 people through hundreds of cases that secure special education programming, help enroll children in school, and prevent improper expulsions.

One of those children was Jamin (*name changed to protect client privacy*), a high school student that had both impressive musical talent and a disability that made it difficult for him to stay out of trouble. His mom was desperate to see him graduate. Unfortunately, Jamin made a mistake that would

result in his expulsion when he got caught gambling. Thanks to BakerHostetler’s support, a Legal Aid staff attorney worked with the school to shore up Jamin’s special education plan as required by law. The attorney also helped Jamin and his mom get a meeting with the superintendent, who reversed the improper expulsion. Jamin since graduated high school and plans to continue studying music in college.

BakerHostetler’s generosity continues to help ensure that the promise of a free and appropriate public education is a reality for each child with whom Legal Aid works.

LEGAL AID IN THE COMMUNITY: PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS
AT LEGAL AID NEIGHBORHOOD CLINICS



1. Volunteer attorneys from Lake and Geauga county bar associations, plus law students from Case Western Reserve University and Cleveland-Marshall College of Law staffed a legal clinic at Chagrin Falls Park Community Center.

2. **Barbara Roman, Esq.** (Meyers Roman)

3. **Mitchell Thompson, Esq.** (Squire Patton Boggs)
4. **Michael Meehan, Esq.** (Cleveland Clinic)

5. **Michele Connell, Esq.** (Squire Patton Boggs)

6. **Gregory Clifford, Magistrate** (Cleveland Municipal Court)

7. **Robert Anderle, Esq.** (Seeley Savidge Ebert & Gourash)

COMING IN OCTOBER

National Celebrate *Pro Bono* Week!

Not just a week anymore, but an entire month filled with recognition events for pro bono lawyers, opportunities to volunteer and collaborations with local bar associations and the judiciary!

For a full list of events in Northeast Ohio, visit: www.lasclev.org/2017probonowebk



VOLUNTEER PREVENTS ‘FAKE LANDLORD’ FROM EVICTING CLIENT

Sheena Waymon had a serious problem with the man who claimed to be her landlord. (Ms. Waymon’s name changed for client privacy). Less than a year earlier, the single mom moved into her Euclid rental house with her young children. Money was always tight, but she had a job and paid her rent. However, when she requested a three-day extension to make her monthly payment, she received a three-day eviction notice instead.

To compound her problems, the court date was set during her work hours. She faced a choice between skipping work at the job she needed and losing the chance to defend her home.

With no money for an attorney, she turned to The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland, where volunteer Carter Strang, a partner at Tucker Ellis LLP, agreed to represent Ms. Waymon. First, Mr. Strang set to

work on the court date’s conflict with Ms. Walker’s work schedule.

“I called up the court to get the lay of the land for the hearing,” Mr. Strang explained. He learned that many eviction cases similar to Ms. Waymon’s go uncontested, so the court schedules several back-to-back on the same day. He also learned filing an answer to the complaint would show the case required more consideration, and the hearing would be held before a magistrate judge at a later time.

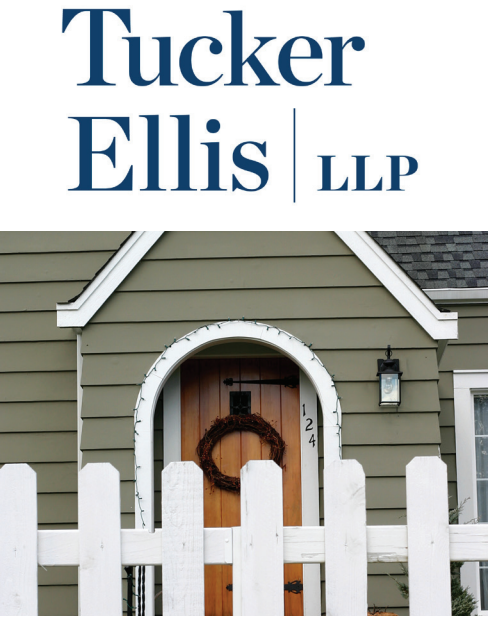
“We determined our case was more complicated and deserved the attention a magistrate could give it,” Mr. Strang explained. “Having the case referred to a magistrate had the side benefit of avoiding the conflict with her schedule. It was a win-win.”

At the hearing, the man who had been harassing Ms. Waymon for rent revealed he did not actually own the home Ms. Waymon was renting. The owner on the deed was not referenced in the complaint or present at the hearing.

When the plaintiff, who was not an attorney, said he was acting as an agent on behalf of the owner, Mr. Strang objected.

Non-lawyers may represent themselves in court, but it is unlawful for them to practice law on behalf of others. The case was dismissed, and Ms. Waymon and her children were able to remain in their home until she found a new place.

Afterwards, Mr. Strang reflected on what he called “a fulfilling and rewarding experience,” in representing his client. “I had such a feeling of satisfaction knowing that the plaintiff couldn’t get away with what he was doing. It certainly made my day.”



PARALEGAL PROFILE: JULIA LAURITZEN



Paralegal **Julia Lauritzen** has long had a passion for public interest work. The Cleveland native did a 3-week job shadow at Legal Aid when she was in high school, and then attended the University of Pittsburgh, where she majored in politics and philosophy. After college, Ms. Lauritzen worked for an anti-hunger advocacy agency as part of the Americorps Vista program. She joined Legal Aid full time in 2015, which fueled her interest in one-on-one advocacy. “There’s such a diverse array of issues, and lots of different ways we can

help people,” she said of her job, which included work with families, immigration issues, and the intersection of the two. She was excited when one of her first cases at Legal Aid was to help a same-sex couple petition for one spouse’s resident status. Other cases gave her insight into how domestic abuse could be compounded when the victim was an immigrant dependent on a U.S. citizen spouse. Ms. Lauritzen is pursuing her interest in fighting injustices against vulnerable people further this fall in law school at The Ohio State University.

LEGAL AID STAFF NEWS

Executive Director **Colleen Cotter (1)** was chosen as one of Crain’s 2017 Woman of Note. The honor is reserved for who have demonstrated exceptional commitment to Northeast Ohio. Crain’s Cleveland Business magazine profiled Colleen in their July issue.



Staff Attorney and Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation Fellow **Rebecca Maurer (2)** and Managing Attorney **Anne Sweeney (3)** were accepted as inaugural **Stokes Fellows** in the **Stokes Civic Leadership Institute**. The SCLI was created by the **Cleveland Leadership Center** and **Cuyahoga Community College** in recognition of the powerful legacy of Cleveland Mayor Carl Stokes and U.S. Congressman Louis Stokes. The SCLI Institute will provide insight into critical problems facing our community and will challenge the Stokes Fellows to develop the collaborative skill set needed to address these issues. Congressman Lou Stokes was a board member and great supporter of Legal Aid.



Supervising Attorney **Julie Cortes (4)** and Deputy Director **Tom Mlakar (5)** were selected for the inaugural **Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association Leadership Academy**. This 10-month program provides leadership and professional development programming for two different groups of attorneys: Emerging Leaders (minimum 5 years legal experience) and Established Leaders (minimum 15 years legal experience). Monthly sessions for the Leadership Academy will kick off in September and conclude in June 2018.



Legal Aid welcomed new attorneys, paralegals and support staff in recent months, including:

- **Joe Tomino**, an attorney in Legal Aid’s Intake and Volunteer Lawyers Program;
- **Mike Russell**, an attorney in the housing practice group who will focus on a new medical-legal partnership with Saint Vincent Charity Hospital;
- **Sara Bird**, an attorney in the housing practice group;
- **Kimberly Barnett-Mills**, a senior attorney in the family practice group;
- **Taylor Hoffman** and **Andrew Torres**, paralegals in the Health, Education, Work, Income and Immigration practice group;
- **Emily Parrino**, a writer in the development and communications department.

Jasmine McCornell (6) was promoted to Intake Specialist after serving several years as Legal Aid’s Cleveland office receptionist.



Katie Laskey-Donovan (7), an attorney at Legal Aid since 2008, is now an attorney in Legal Aid’s medical-legal partnership with MetroHealth. Ms. Laskey-Donovan will focus her practice at MetroHealth’s McCafferty Health Center and use her fluency in Spanish to help MetroHealth patients access Legal Aid and remove legal barriers to their health.



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OF THOUGHTFUL, COMMITTED CITIZENS
CAN CHANGE THE WORLD; INDEED,
IT’S THE ONLY THING THAT EVER HAS.”** *- MARGARET MEAD*

LEGAL AID’S 112TH ANNUAL MEETING

Monday, November 20, 2017 • Hilton Cleveland Downtown

11:15 a.m. - reception & networking 11:45 a.m. - luncheon begins

Presentation of the Louis Stokes Paragon Award to:

John Levi, Esq. (Sidley Austin LLP), Board Chair – Legal Services Corporation

James J. Sandman, Esq., President – Legal Services Corporation

Keynote Remarks by: James J. Sandman, President – Legal Services Corporation

MORE INFO AND TICKETS: WWW.LASCLEV.ORG/2017EVENT



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