

Volume III, Number 5 December 2009

EIGHTH DISTRICT COMMITTEE RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

By Amanda Warner

Eighth Judicial District ProBonoNY Coordinator

The Eighth Judicial District Committee has a lot to report since our last update, published in the September issue of the **Bulletin**. First, we wrapped up our Family Law Training Series at the end of September. The series, co-sponsored with the Erie County Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Project (VLP), consisted of training programs on divorce, non-parent custody petitions, and child support proceedings. Collectively, the attorneys who attended the sessions committed to handling a total of 65 pro bono matrimonial and family law cases in the coming year.

On October 27, the Committee co-hosted with VLP a training program on "Handling Unemployment Insurance Hearings." The trainers were Marcella Seaburg-Brackett, Senior Administrative Law Judge at the Unemployment Insurance Appeal Board in Buffalo, and Tracey Covey, Esq., a labor law attorney and VLP volunteer. Twenty-three people

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NEWS FROM THE SEVENTH DISTRICT COMMITTEE

By Amy Christensen

Member, Seventh Judicial District ProBonoNY
Committee

Nineteen attorneys from Steuben County were honored at a reception held in celebration of National Pro Bono Week on October 30, 2009, at Sonora's Restaurant in Bath. The attorneys were recognized for volunteering their time to assist low-income clients through the Southern Tier Volunteer Lawyers Project, a program of Southern Tier Legal Services. The event was part of the first-ever National Pro Bono Week, established by the American Bar Association to recognize the important contributions of volunteer attorneys and to encourage more attorneys to volunteer. Southern Tier Legal Services and ProBonoNY joined in that celebration.

Hon. Henry J. Scudder, Presiding Justice of the Appellate Division, Fourth Department, and formerly Supreme Court Justice in Steuben County, congratulated

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attended the training and each received two free CLE credits in exchange for a commitment represent pro bono at least one claimant who has been denied benefits in an appeal to the Board.

In related news, starting with the Family Law Training Series, VLP has been video recording all of its training programs, in hope of being approved by the New York CLE Board to award CLE credit to attorneys who check out the recorded training programs and materials for self-study. I am pleased to report that VLP was granted "Approval of Nontraditional Format" on December 4. This is significant for the Committee's recruiting efforts, as it will allow the recordings to be used for both group and individual CLE trainings throughout the District, most notably for attorneys in our rural areas who often find it extremely difficult to fulfill their CLE requirements because of the inconvenience of often having hours-long travel times to the locations of live CLE programs. Attorneys who view the recordings and obtain the printed materials will be eligible to receive free CLE credit if they agree to take a pro bono matter referred by the pro bono program serving their county.

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the award recipients and presented certificates of appreciation provided by ProBonoNY. Hon. Marianne Furfure and Hon. Joseph Latham also attended the event.

Amy Christensen, Deputy Director of Southern Tier Legal Services and a member of the ProBonoNY Committee for the Seventh Judicial District, thanked the volunteer attorneys for their service and highlighted the impact of their efforts: "Your help has meant a victim of domestic violence could obtain a divorce from an abusive spouse . . . a terminally ill man could have piece of mind in his last days, because he knew his legal affairs were in order."

The American Bar Association described the National Pro Bono Week Celebration as "a coordinated national effort to showcase the great difference that pro bono attorneys make to the nation, its system of justice, its communities, and, most of all, to the clients they serve. The week was also dedicated to the quest for more pro bono volunteers to meet the ever-growing legal needs of this country's most vulnerable citizens." The local pro bono celebration was sponsored by Southern Tier Legal Services, a division of Legal

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On October 29, several Committee members attended the “Champions for Justice Bash” in Buffalo, a fund-raising pro bono celebration co-sponsored by VLP and Legal Services for the Elderly, Disabled or Disadvantaged of Western New York (LSED), an event attended by more than 300 people.

Prior to the Bash, the Committee co-sponsored with VLP and LSED a “VIP” Pro Bono Award Reception at which awards were presented to recognize some of the most outstanding pro bono efforts by individual lawyers and law firms working with VLP during the past year. Awards were presented by

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Assistance of Western New York, Inc., and the Seventh Judicial District ProBonoNY Committee.

Pictured in the photograph below, taken at the Steuben County reception on October 30, 2009, are (from left to right): Hon. Henry J. Scudder; Dale Clark; Wendy Gould; George Welch; David Wallace; William Joint; George Welch, Jr.; Philip Roche; and Amy Christensen.

Honorees not pictured include: Peter Baker, Deetza Benno, Lise Hall, John Leyden, Joan Merry, Judith Palumbo, Timothy Rosell, Brian Schu, Eric Shults, Bonita Stubblefield, Christine Valkenburgh, and Colleen Zink.

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Hon. Paula L. Feroletto, Administrative Judge of the Eighth Judicial District and co-chair of the Committee.

Also during National Pro Bono Week, the Committee organized a mailing to Niagara County attorneys signed by Hon. Ralph A. Boniello, Hon. Frank Caruso, and Hon. Richard C. Kloch, Sr., which enclosed a roster of attorneys who accepted pro bono cases through Niagara County Legal Aid Society in 2008 and 2009, thanking them for their service and encouraging other Niagara County lawyers to join their ranks. The letter was followed up by an e-mail from Judge Feroletto which attached a pro bono registration form with a list of opportunities tailored to the needs and priorities of clients of Niagara County Legal Aid Society.

On November 2, the Chautauqua County ProBonoNY Committee, together with the Bar Association of Northern Chautauqua, the Jamestown Bar Association, Southern Tier Legal Services, and Legal Aid of Chautauqua Region, hosted a lunchtime reception honoring "Chautauqua County's Pro Bono All Stars"—those attorneys who accepted pro

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bono case referrals through Southern Tier Legal Services and Legal Aid of Chautauqua Region this year in response to the Chautauqua County ProBonoNY Committee's call for an "organized" pro bono effort in the County. The reception was well attended by local attorneys. Hon. Paula L. Feroletto and Hon. Stephen W. Cass spoke on the importance of pro bono to the courts as well as needy clients, and Hon. Judith S. Claire, Hon. James Dillon, and Hon. John T. Ward were in attendance to help distribute the awards to the 25 award recipients.

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NINTH DISTRICT COMMITTEE NEWS

By Carol Neiditch

Ninth Judicial District ProBonoNY Coordinator

The Ninth Judicial District's newest active ProBonoNY Committee commenced activities earlier this year in Rockland County. Chaired by Hon. Thomas E. Walsh II, Rockland County Surrogate, the committee is comprised of judges and court attorneys, private practitioners, the executive director of the Legal Aid Society of Rockland County, and representatives of the

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Rockland County Bar Association, the Rockland Women’s Bar Association, and community organizations. The Rockland Committee joins the parent Ninth District Westchester County ProBonoNY Committee and the ProBonoNY Committees for Orange and Dutchess Counties.

The Rockland Committee’s kick-off event was held on May 8, 2009, and distinguished guests, including Hon. Francis A. Nicolai (former Ninth District Administrative Judge), stressed the need for pro bono representation of local citizens, especially in today’s troubled economy. Many Rockland attorneys answered the call by registering for the Volunteer Attorney Panel. The Rockland Committee’s first training program was a four-CLE-credit guardian *ad litem* training program held October 14, in advance celebration of National Pro Bono Week. Judge Anthony Scarpino’s popular program attracted over 75 participants. Cases to be handled pro bono by these volunteers are now being referred by the Legal Aid Society via the pro bono unit of Legal Services of the Hudson Valley.

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The last week of October–National Pro Bono Week–was a busy one in the Ninth Judicial District. The committees in Westchester, Orange, and Dutchess Counties all held celebratory events during that week, proudly cooperating with county bar associations and other legal organizations as co-sponsors. In Dutchess County, the events were held on October 27. The day started out with committee members greeting attorneys in the lobby of the Dutchess County Courthouse, providing them with the opportunity to register then and there for our volunteer attorney panel. This was followed by an afternoon three-credit CLE program on “Matrimonial Nuts and Bolts,” with special emphasis on the view from the bench and a domestic violence perspective. Many attorneys commented on the eye-opening information they received on how to identify and help domestic violence victims, declaring their appreciation for valuable insights on how to handle such cases. The day culminated in a “Partners in Justice” reception, recognizing a local attorney and a paralegal for their devotion to pro bono clients and public service.

On October 28, the day started in Orange County with a breakfast meet-

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and-greet event at the Orange County Courthouse. This was followed by a CLE program on child support issues. In the evening, a festive “Partners in Justice “ reception was held at a local restaurant. The Committee was particularly pleased that Hon. Fern A. Fisher was able to attend this standing-room-only event. The Orange County Committee is fortunate in having strong support from many local law firms, and several firms as well as a number of solo practitioners were recognized for their extensive pro bono services.

The week’s activities culminated on October 29 in Westchester County. A morning courthouse meet-and-greet event was followed by an afternoon CLE program held at Pace University Law School, on a topic especially relevant to the day: “Responding to the Needs of Westchester: Pro Bono Opportunities and Ethical Considerations.” A Pro Bono Expo, sponsored in conjunction with the Westchester Women’s Bar Association, was held in the entrance atrium of the Judicial Institute after the CLE program. Representatives of local legal service providers and community and student organizations were on hand to distribute information and recruit volunteers. This

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event was especially popular with recent law school graduates looking for opportunities to get started while also serving the public good, as well as more seasoned attorneys considering new practice areas for pro bono service.

The grand finale to Pro Bono Week in the Ninth Judicial District was the “Partners in Justice” evening reception at the Judicial Institute, attended by many local dignitaries, including judges, the Westchester County District Attorney, and several local legislators. Plaques were presented to local attorneys and law firms for their pro bono contributions in helping clients, especially in the areas of landlord/tenant matters, bankruptcy, and unemployment insurance benefits. A special award went to Hon. Francis A. Nicolai, who, as former Ninth District Administrative Judge, was the leader in forming and inspiring our ProBonoNY Local Action Committees.

Recipients of awards at these Ninth District Pro Bono Week celebrations were—

In Dutchess County:

Miesha Rodriguez, Esq.

Debbie Wright, Legal Assistant

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In Orange County:

Henry Christensen, Esq.
Nadine Parks, Esq.
Jacobowitz & Gubits, LLP, with
special recognition to
Michael Carey, Esq.
Larkin, Axelrod, Ingrassia &
Tetenbaum, LLP
Tarshis, Catania, Liberth, Mahon
& Milligram, PLLC

In Westchester County:

Hon. Francis A. Nicolai
Dawn Arnold, Esq.
Robert Byrne, Esq.
Julie Cvek, Esq.
Barbara Lerman, Esq.
McCarthy Fingar, LLP

At the Pro Bono Week awards ceremonies throughout the District, the recipients' thank-you remarks focused on their clients' needs and on the volunteers' gratitude for opportunities to be of genuine service to people in need. Time and again, the awards recipients expressed their thanks to the Committee and to Legal Services of the Hudson Valley or other service-providing organizations for helping to organize the pro bono work and working to connect

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needy clients with pro bono attorneys. Very moving were the attorneys' enthusiasm for their clients and for the work and their gratitude for the pro bono opportunities to serve. Truly, these celebratory events were an expression of a genuine working partnership of the members of ProBonoNY and local attorneys, service providers, law school faculty, bar associations, and other stakeholders working to increase and enhance attorneys' pro bono work. We are looking forward to holding such celebrations again next October.

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NOTES & COMMENTS

By John Ritchie

Best wishes for the holidays and for the New Year! I look forward to seeing you all in the near future at committee meetings or upcoming committee-sponsored CLE programs.