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THIRD DISTRICT NEWS

By Erika Hanks

Following the passage of the remedial mortgage foreclosure legislation last year, Third District staff began thinking about the recruitment of pro bono attorneys to handle the mandatory foreclosure conferences that were to begin in early 2009. Regina Treffiletti and I (both of us staff members in the Third Judicial District Administrative Office) and members of the Third District's Pro Bono Discussion Group met with representatives of Legal Aid, The Legal Project, Empire Justice Center, and Albany County Bar Association.

Knowing that resources for holding another Pro Bono Expo, like the one sponsored by the Discussion Group in April 2007, were unavailable, we discussed several different ideas. Given the economic situation, it was thought that attorneys and litigants would both benefit from a series of pro bono trainings involving not only mortgage foreclosures, but also unemployment benefit hearings, bankruptcies, and other related matters. The service providers thought that the backing of the Administrative Judge would be invaluable, and it was decided that Judge Ceresia would send a letter to area attorneys, law firms, and large-firm managing partners to publicize the trainings and encourage participation.

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NEWS from the SEVENTH DISTRICT

By Linda Kostin

The Seventh Judicial District ProBonoNY Committee held a meeting on October 1 to review activities and initiatives for 2009 to date. The Committee was pleased to welcome the Hon. Fern A. Fisher, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for New York City Courts and Director, NYS Courts Access to Justice Program.

In addition to Justice Fisher, the Committee welcomed as guests the Hon. Mark H. Fandrich (Cayuga County), the Hon. John M. Owens (Monroe County), John Ritchie, and Kevin Nasca. Committee members attending were the Hon. Dennis F. Bender (cross-assigned to Seneca and Yates Counties), the Hon. W. Patrick Falvey (cross-assigned to Yates and Seneca Counties), the Hon. William F. Kocher (Ontario County), Amy L. Christensen, Sheila A. Gaddis, Timothy C. Hunt, and Connie O. Walker.

Ongoing initiatives include the new VLSP Pro Bono Hotline. Currently in beta testing at Nixon Peabody in Rochester, the hotline offers attorneys a flexible two-hour pro bono opportunity in which they can participate from the convenience of their own offices. Pro bono attorneys sign up for any two-hour block of time they wish, Monday through Friday, during

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A calendar of events was planned, and over 1200 letters were sent out in mid-June. Almost the entire staff of the Administrative Office was involved in processing these letters. In addition, a slightly different version of the letter was sent to 60 managing partners of the area's largest firms.

We also held a breakfast meeting on September 8th with Justice Ceresia and the managing partners, to follow up on our letters. We had a good turnout, with about 20 managing partners in attendance. Establishing a pro bono policy, as well as actually participating in pro bono work, was the theme. Dan Hurteau, partner at Nixon Peabody and a member of our Discussion Group, spoke about his firm's recently updated policy. Anne Reynolds Copps also spoke, describing her experience as a solo practitioner who handles several pro bono cases a month, as well as frequently staffing various legal clinics sponsored by The Legal Project and Legal Aid. David Miranda, President of the Albany County Bar Association, spoke about the importance and rewards of pro bono and the efforts of the Bar Association to support and encourage such work.

The Discussion Group believes that the letters from Judge Ceresia, in combination with the managing partners breakfast meeting, were responsible for the definite increase in attendance at the trainings that were held during the summer and fall.

During National Pro Bono Week, again partnering with Legal Aid, the Legal Project, and the Albany County Bar Association, the Discussion Group will sponsor a series of clinics that will be held Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday of Pro Bono Week in the Albany and Rensselaer County Courthouses. Volunteers from local law firms and

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business hours. VLSP provides each attorney with the names of up to six clients who have been advised that an attorney will call them within the selected time frame. Volunteer attorneys conduct screening interviews and offer advice and counsel on consumer law issues. The hotline is proving to be a popular volunteer opportunity—other Rochester firms have inquired as to when they might be able to begin volunteering in this fashion.

Encouraged by the reaction of attorneys in Rochester, the Committee has plans underway to replicate the hotline model in the rural counties of the Seventh District.

NOTES and COMMENTS

By John Ritchie

Note & Comments will continue next issue. In this issue, I'm glad to have an article by Erika Hanks, who is a staff member in the Third Judicial District Office and is the district's Access to Justice Coordinator.

I'm traveling a good deal this week and next, attending as many committee-sponsored Pro Bono Week events as I can. I'm looking forward to seeing many of you over the next week or so. Best wishes for Pro Bono Week!

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legal service providers will staff the clinics. Topics will include wills and bankruptcy and consumer debt, as well as mortgage foreclosures.

In addition, we are displaying testimonial posters in our courthouses, in which Judge Ceresia recognizes individual attorneys who are dedicated pro bono volunteers. These testimonial posters will remain in the courthouses and the Empire State Plaza throughout Pro Bono Week.