

# THE DAILY RECORD

WESTERN NEW YORK'S SOURCE FOR LAW, REAL ESTATE, FINANCE AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE SINCE 1908

## Realization of a dream: The Telesca Center for Justice

The Hon. Michael A. Telesca Center for Justice has become a reality.

It is now functioning as a unique partnership among the Monroe County Bar Association and its Rubin Center for Education, the Foundation of the Monroe County Bar and four legal services providers: The Legal Aid Society, Empire Justice Center, Monroe County Legal Assistance Center and the Volunteer Legal Services Project. The legal services providers, the MCBA, and the foundation now work together, side-by-side, to serve justice.

The vision of the founders of the Telesca Center for Justice was to bring the legal services providers and the bar together, all in one building, enabling them to work together more efficiently. Being in a single location allows the agencies — all of which have very tight operating budgets and are dependent on annual fundraising, grants and governmental support — to achieve important operating economies and share resources.

Clients who are uncertain just which agency they should be visit are given a warm welcome and clear guidance, so that they are properly screened and assigned to the legal services provider that can best assist them. The legal services providers also share reception areas, conference rooms, the Nixon Board Room and the Rubin Education Center, all of which reduces operating costs and increases efficiency.

Perhaps more importantly, the providers share human resources, as well as with the MCBA and the foundation. The executive directors those groups meet together regularly to share ideas and coordinate plans and calendars. Members of the MCBA serve as volunteer lawyers for the VLSP and serve on the boards of trustees of several of the provider agencies. The MCBA offers CLE to staff lawyers from the legal services providers at a special discount, and promotes their programs in its mailings and through its Web site and e-mail blasts.

The MCBA and the providers also continue to work closely on the annual Campaign for Justice, which provides critical operating support for three of the providers. Such collaboration improves the professional atmosphere for legal services staff lawyers, and also keeps access to justice and legal services issues in the minds of MCBA members as they come to the

Telesca Justice Center for CLE or bar meetings. In many intangible as well as economic ways, such proximity and overlap supports the legal services providers and reinforces their mission along with that of the bar.

The Telesca Center for Justice is named for the U.S. District Court Judge Michael A. Telesca, Western District of New York, whose work as a federal judge is both legendary and a continuing inspiration. His life's work has been to do justice, in his own inimitable way. He understands that all should be equal before the bar of justice, and that all — rich or poor, black or white, man or woman, corporation or individual — should have a fair and equal opportunity to be heard in our courts.

Judge Telesca set the standard in making the federal court open and accessible to all who have federal rights at issue. His decisions show his special sensitivity for those who have very little, and his example encourages all in the legal profession to try to measure up to those key principles.

For those reasons the name "Telesca" is itself a key ingredient in the Telesca Center for Justice. His name inspires all who work there to try to measure up to his standards and work towards ensuring justice for all. His name also has motivated donors, who have contributed handsomely to making the Telesca Center for Justice a reality. They have pledged more than \$1.7 million so far, and the Partnership Campaign for the Telesca Center for Justice is closing in on its \$2 million goal.

So far the funds have been used to pay off tenant improvements for the spaces occupied by the partner agencies and the MCBA and the foundation, they have ensured a flat rent for many years in the future, have reimbursed moving and other costs of the partnership agencies and the bar, and provided additional funds for each of the agencies at a time when funds are very scarce and endowments and giving have declined.

Remaining funds to be raised will form an endowment in the foundation for the benefit of the partner agencies, significantly increasing the foundation's own endowment. The proceeds will be restricted to fund grants to support the work of these agencies in the future. The core funds will be secure and permanent, ensuring ongoing income to fund many more grants to the agen-

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cies in the years to come.

Another part of the dream that is close to realization is to help the Telesca Center for Justice look more like a justice center should. Improvements to the lobby and adjacent space will allow the Telesca Center to appear more welcoming to clients, help them to find their way more efficiently and also allow all who enter to recognize Judge Telesca and Hanna Cohn, who meant so much to legal services, and also the donors who made the center possible. Additional funds to accomplish these physical improvements also are close at hand.

A new sign soon will grace the building, and the name "Four Corners Building" now above the entrance will be replaced with "Telesca Center for Justice," illuminated at night, so that all who come to Rochester's old financial and legal crossroads will have a beacon, guiding them to a true place of justice. Those who wish to support this dream still have the chance to be counted, and there are few causes more noble.

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