

# THE DAILY RECORD

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

## MCBAPRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

# MCBA: Collaboration helps all work together

The Monroe County Bar Association has been asked to testify before Chief Judge Lippman's Task Force to Expand Access to Civil Legal Services about how collaboration among the association, the Foundation of the Monroe County Bar, and the civil legal services providers has expanded access to justice while lowering costs.

But before sharing our success with the task force, I want to share the results of it with you, the attorneys and others in our community who made it possible. It is fair to say that the results exceeded the expectations of everyone involved.

For prospective clients with legal needs, the co-location of Empire Justice Center, Monroe County Legal Assistance Center, the Legal Aid Society of Rochester, and Volunteer Legal Services Project, with the Monroe County Bar Association at the Telesca Center for Justice has made life much easier.

A phone call to the number of any of the legal services providers in the building is answered by one of the shared receptionists on the eighth floor. While they are employed by different organizations, all of them are cross trained and equipped so they can answer any of the incoming lines.

So if a prospective client whose neighbor was helped by one of the legal services providers calls with a legal problem that is not handled by that provider, she is not just given another number to call. Instead, she is asked whether she would like to be directly connected to the organization that actually can help her. If she comes into the building she is not sent across town but can take a short elevator ride to people who can help her.

This not only helps clients get the legal services they need, but also saves money for the legal services organizations. Prior to the new reception system, prospective clients would call each of the providers and would tell their story to a staff member, only to be told that they needed to call another number and tell their story over again. Many would try all four offices as well as the

Bar Association spending several minutes on each call before getting help or finding out that no one could help them. With hundreds of calls per week, the savings from one-stop shopping quickly mount.

The largest cost savings have been achieved through a combination of the below-market rents and more effective use of space. The below-market rents were made possible by both the large amount of space that we are renting — almost six floors of the building — and by the more than \$2.4 million raised by the Partnership Campaign, to which so many of you contributed.

Justin Vigdor provided extraordinary leadership and, with the help of dozens of committed volunteers, not only raised the money needed for the co-location and the build-out of the space, but also raised enough for additional technology support and to create an initial fund at the foundation for longer term support for the providers. The more effective use of space is achieved through smaller offices and shared conference, reception and other space.

The MCBA and the civil legal services providers collectively will save more than \$175,000 this year, compared to what we would have to spend at market rates for similar space.

The savings translate into more services for clients. For example, Empire Justice Center will save enough this year to pay for the costs of an additional attorney. And, each year the savings for each of the co-located organizations grows because the Telesca Center rent is fixed at \$10 per square foot for the first 15 years of our lease. Additional cost savings are realized through joint purchasing of goods and services.

The co-location has helped increase access to justice by making it easier for the legal services programs to collaborate on joint funding applications, in a number of cases for funding that no provider would have received on its own. The civil legal services providers are now involved in more than a dozen

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By **BRYAN D. HETHERINGTON**

Daily Record  
Columnist

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grants in which one provider is the primary grantee and one or more of the others (sometimes all) participate by providing services in their own areas of practice. As one funder put it, "The Telesca Center is like a large law firm with a number of departments."

This ability to collaborate also benefits the clients. Clients may have legal problems that are being handled by attorneys in two of the different offices. For example, the incorrect loss of public benefits may lead to an eviction proceeding. Because of the co-location, the attorneys from the two programs and their client can meet together and coordinate strategy in both cases.

The co-location also helps the Bar Association support *pro*

*bono* efforts at Volunteer Legal Services Project. When an attorney comes in to join the Association, our staff can ask whether the attorney is already a volunteer at VLSP and, if not, take or send them down to the fifth floor to sign up. The VLSP offices are intentionally located next to our Rubin Center for Education to remind attorneys of their *pro bono* obligation and to make it easy for VLSP staff to do recruitment.

And the effort is not yet done. Each year the association, foundation and providers find new ways to collaborate, work together to meet unmet community needs and save on expenses.

*Bryan D. Hetherington is president of the Monroe County Bar Association. He is chief counsel of the Empire Justice Center, located in the Telesca Center for Justice. He can be reached at [bhetherington@empirejustice.org](mailto:bhetherington@empirejustice.org).*