

# Legal Aid *matters*

## *our mission*

The Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York provides effective, free civil legal services and education to and advocacy for people with low income or other barriers to accessing the legal system. We secure basic needs, protect and preserve legal rights, provide equal access to justice and seek fairness and dignity for our clients.

Serving the low-income and needy residents of Albany, Clinton, Columbia, Essex, Franklin, Fulton, Greene, Hamilton, Montgomery, Rensselaer, Saratoga, St. Lawrence, Schoharie, Warren and Washington Counties, and the St. Regis Reservation.

## *executive director*

Lillian M. Moy

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*Left to right: Dennis J. Tarantino, Patricia E. Watkins, William L. Nikas; Hon. John C. Mannix, Jr.; Matthew R. Ludemann, Jill E. O'Sullivan, Edward P. Fitzgerald, Amy C. Bartlett.*

There's no place like home, and for LASNNY's grateful Saratoga Springs clients and staff, home is now 40 New Street. Thanks to the generous donations of the legal community, the Saratoga Springs Capital Campaign is more than halfway to its \$266,000 goal.

LASNNY was bursting at the seams in its 112 Spring Street office, working to meet the burgeoning legal needs of low-income residents in Saratoga, Warren and Washington counties, when it decided to seek a location that could accommodate the growing program.

"The campaign was called 'The Right Time for the Right Place' for a reason," said Lillian M. Moy, Executive Director, LASNNY. "It was the perfect space in the perfect location, right on a busline, and it had already housed a nonprofit. We couldn't pass up this opportunity to solidify an outpost for

access to justice in Saratoga Springs, and we are eternally grateful to matching gift donors Stu Jones, our president; Jim Towne of Towne, Ryan & Partners, P.C.; and all our colleagues on the bar who rose to the challenge to help make it happen."

**"donating time and money to provide legal aid to vulnerable populations is an ethical responsibility of all attorneys"**

— E. Stewart Jones, Jr., LASNNY President

The 5,500 square foot building now holds the necessary additional staff and volunteers to meet the housing, income, health care, safety, stability, education and consumer protection needs of more clients. The building also sports a new multi-purpose conference room to allow the staff to better offer on-site classes.

*continues on page 11*

# Growing Leadership and Representation

**A**t Legal Aid, we're committed to serving our clients as extensively as possible, and helping to change their lives for the better. We have been lucky to be able to bring on some very talented new staff while retaining many of our more senior colleagues. Internally, we have begun to build new leaders amongst our advocacy staff, focusing on increasing systemic results for clients, increasing our community engagement across a variety of areas and counties and growing into a larger and more productive law firm.

At the end of 2014, we were thrilled to receive three STOP grants from the NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services to serve victims of domestic violence throughout the service area. This was an extremely competitive bidding process, and we were delighted that our long term projects in Saratoga, Warren and Washington Counties and Columbia and Greene Counties were renewed. In addition,

in 2015, we have expanded our domestic violence representation in St. Lawrence County. Kudos to our domestic violence staff, including Joanna Davis, Susan Griskonis, Carlotta Palmer, Gerry Schafer, Ben Terry and Shannon Woods.

We were also gratified at the renewal of our Solutions To End Homelessness Program (STEHP) grants. We will provide homelessness prevention services throughout the most rural sections of our service area and, at a reduced level, in Albany County. Grateful appreciation to our community partners who made much of this STEHP funding possible: the Albany County Department of Social Services, Schenectady Community Action Program, Unity House, St. Paul's Center and Evergreen Townhouse Corporation. Thanks also to the Columbia County, Fulton County, Montgomery County, St. Lawrence County and Saratoga County Departments of Social Services who supported our applications. Without your support and partnership, our STEHP programs would not be possible.

We are also hopeful that in 2015 many of our pro bono programs will experience even more growth. In March, our Private Attorney Involvement staff moved to our Saratoga Springs office at 40 New Street. The PAI staff, Michele Sleight, Cheryl Dedes and Drew Wagner, will continue to support our many programs throughout the service area, including the Albany City Court, the Albany VA Medical Center and the Albany County Family Court Help Center.

Many thanks to the Warren County Bar Foundation which recently closed out an incredibly successful Challenge Grant to support our new

FROM THE *executive director*



home in Saratoga Springs. The Warren County Bar Foundation raised \$40,000 – thanks to the many Warren County lawyers and Jim Towne, who stepped up to

meet the Foundation's unprecedented challenge. In addition Jim Towne and E. Stewart Jones have pledged a one-to-one match up to \$20,000. Please help us raise an additional \$121,000 to meet our remaining expenses for the Saratoga Springs office purchase. Your gifts are a model for future capital campaigns – thank you for your leadership.

As always, I welcome your ideas for expanding and improving our civil legal services. You can always reach me at [lmoy@lasnny.org](mailto:lmoy@lasnny.org) or call me at 518-689-6304.

Peace,

## Legal Aid matters

### Summer 2015

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#### Offices:

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### Client Programs:

- Children's Law Project
- Community Legal Education and Training
- Consumer Law Clinic
- Disability Advocacy Project
- Domestic Violence Legal Assistance Project
- Foreclosure Prevention Project
- HIV/AIDS Legal Consortium
- Homelessness Intervention Project
- Legal Aid Society Homelessness Project
- Low Income Taxpayer Clinic
- Nutrition Outreach & Education
- Protection & Advocacy for the Developmentally Disabled
- Protection & Advocacy for the Mentally Ill
- Saratoga Springs Homelessness Prevention Program
- Senior Legal Services Program
- Upstate New York Immigration Law Project

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- Justice for All Campaign, Annual Appeal
- Law Day Celebration
- Legal Aid Endowment Guardians of Justice
- Private Attorney Involvement Program (PAI)
- Saratoga Springs Capital Campaign

*You may be on the  
Business Review  
lists, but are you  
on ours?*



## Campaign

The Annual Fund for  
the Legal Aid Society of  
Northeastern New York

Thanks to our donors  
who contributed  
\$270,000 in 2014,  
improving access  
to justice for low  
income neighbors of  
Northeastern New York.

[www.lasnyy.org](http://www.lasnyy.org).

To join the 2015 Campaign,  
contact Deanne Grimaldi at  
518-689-6336 or  
[dgrimaldi@lasnyy.org](mailto:dgrimaldi@lasnyy.org)

### 2014 Campaign Co-Chairs:

E. Stewart Jones Jr.  
and  
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# Divorce, American Style

Getting a divorce is never pleasant business, but for Julie Tucker, the assistance she received from Legal Aid's PAI (Private Attorney Involvement) volunteer, Emily Muller, made the process both positive and dignified. "Getting help from Legal Aid was so easy, I had no idea. I was so ashamed to have to contact them in the first place, but no one there ever made me feel a need to be," said Tucker. "Everyone was extremely helpful and guided me to those I needed to speak with. Kathy [who helped put Julie in touch with Emily] went over and beyond to help me and she was sincerely interested in 'me'. I never felt like I was just another case."

Emily Muller is no stranger to the work of assisting LASNNY clients. The recipient of the New York State Bar Association President's Pro Bono Service Award, and the 2007 PAI Program Distinguished Service Award, Muller is a solo practitioner working primarily in family and marital law.

Muller was impressed with Julie, who suffers from a back injury and is no longer able to work. "Julie is a nurse and is accustomed to helping people herself, rather than taking help from others...she easily met the income guidelines to receive assistance from Legal Aid." Tucker's own self-advocacy was a key factor in the positive outcome of her case, Muller remarked. "Julie was so willing to answer questions, provide the information I needed, and so grateful for the work I was doing, that it was a pleasure to assist her."

Muller was admitted to practice law in the State of New York in January 1999. She is a member of the Saratoga County Bar Association, the Collaborative Divorce Association of

the Capital District, and the Collaborative North Practice Group, as well as a former member of the New York State Bar Association. She accepts assignments as Attorney for the Child in Saratoga and Warren Counties, as Guardian Ad Litem for Warren County, and as counsel for the Saratoga County Public De-

## PROFILE: PAI volunteer



**This is a very important service, and I join my LASNNY colleagues in feeling that justice should be the same for all, regardless of ability to pay.**

fender's Office and the Washington County Public Defender's Office.

She sees her work as a LASSNY volunteer as critical. "Legal Aid provides the opportunity for people who have financial need to access the same court services available to those with more disposable income. This is a very important service, and I join my LASNNY colleagues in feeling that justice should be the same for all, regardless of ability to pay." Despite an extremely busy schedule, Muller said that her

volunteer service gives her a true sense of inner satisfaction.

Julie Tucker's opinion of the value of the services she received is apparent: "If ever the occasion arises I would without a doubt refer anyone I know to Legal Aid and Emily. They worked as a team and I am very grateful. Emily was gracious and understanding; she explained every step of the way and I really felt I was in good hands. At an extremely difficult time in my life, Emily made it all go so smooth. Emily has compassion. She NEVER made me feel 'less than' because I could not pay her. I feel I received the same services as anyone else would have. Emily listened to me and what I wanted and made changes to the divorce decree as deemed necessary. Emily was a god-send in my life and I will be forever grateful to her."

## Congratulations, Michele!



**On April 12, 2015, PAI Director Michele Sleight delivered her first baby, Carolyn. Mother and baby are doing great, and Michele says she is "quite smitten."**

## Thanks to the following attorneys who took cases:

September 1, 2014 – June 30, 2015

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Mireille Nitti  
Alan R. Rhodes

## PAI Update

Michele Sleight



The PAI Program remains busy in 2015! PAI is now located at Legal Aid's Saratoga Springs office, but our various programs will remain in their same locations. For several months, we worked to ensure that this transition was smooth and minimally disruptive, if at all, for our clients and pro bono attorneys. As always, Legal Aid will be teaming up with our community partners to co-sponsor some fantastic trainings this year. Once the logistics are set and complete, notices will be sent out in plenty of time to register.

In October, we welcomed Cheyenne James to Legal Aid as both our Pro Bono Innovator and Staff Attorney. In her role as Pro Bono Innovator, she has been recruiting both law students, primarily from Albany Law School, and attorneys emeritus to volunteer with us in our programs. She is off to a great start, and we hope that you'll meet her soon if you haven't already.

February 2015 marked the end of my first year as the PAI Director. Reflecting on the last 16 months, I'm proud of the work that has been accomplished, but there is always more to be done. My staff and I look forward to working with our pro bono attorneys.

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# Saratoga Springs Grand Opening

On June 4, 2015, dignitaries, donors and community advocates gathered to celebrate the official opening of the new Saratoga Springs office at 40 New Street.



*(Right) Cutting the ribbon is James Towne, accompanied by (from right) E. Stewart Jones, Jr., Ronald Kim, Harry Snyder, M. Elizabeth Libby Coreno, among others.*

*Left: M. Elizabeth Libby Coreno, Lillian Moy*

*Right: Ronald Kim, Matthew Veitch.*



*Below left: Jeffrey Sherrin, Peter Coffey*

*Below right: LASNNY Staff showing the new conference room to Dennis O'Connor and Harry Snyder of the Alfred Z. Solomon Charitable Trust.*



*Below: Matthew Luddeman, Patricia Watkins, Dennis O'Connor, Lillian Moy.*



*Below: Lillian Moy with the Dynamic trio: James Towne, Sue Towne, E. Stewart Jones, Jr.*



*Left: LASNNY staff Drew Wagner and Cheryl Dedes flank Janet Axelrod.*

*Below: LASNNY attorney Mary Withington with Daniel Mannix.*



*Above: E. Stewart Jones Jr. welcomes the crowd.*

*Right: Donors to the Capital Campaign Challenge pose in front of the building.*

To see the slideshow of the event, go to the photos page at [www.lasnnny.org](http://www.lasnnny.org)





The red tape of filing a Social Security Disability claim is a nightmare familiar to thousands of Americans. But thanks to the help of Legal Aid attorney Adam DeFayette, who practices out of LASNNY's Plattsburgh office, and veteran Joseph Perry's dogged determination and preparation, the nightmare is over.

A veteran of both Desert Shield and Desert Storm, Joe, a single father raising two boys in the North Country, has been pursuing assistance from both the VA and the Social Security Administration for many years. His long Navy service contributed to his disabling conditions. After many years of denials and frustration, Joe turned to LASNNY for help.

Adam's role as a "skilled advocate"

illness and disability. "Unfortunately, Joe's initial application was denied, an exceptionally common outcome, explained Adam.

"The application process can be confusing, and if it's not something you do every day (like I do); most people have no idea how to make their claim truly effective," Adam continued. "An appeal can actually be a much more humane and comprehensive examination of the person's limitations than the initial application; as a result something like 50% of claims are won on appeal. These are the same people, with the same disabilities, that were initially denied. This about-face is primarily the result of enlisting an experienced practitioner that knows what Social Security is actually looking for."



*A young Joseph Perry in his Navy jacket.*

## Cutting through the red tape

(a designation he wears with humility) proved to be a critical element in winning Joe's case: "Joe had a lengthy work history, which means that he paid into social security via payroll withholdings, just as all working people do - it's supposed to be a form of insurance that you can draw off of in the event of chronic

Joe's case was financed through a special LASNNY grant which funds low-income social security applicants that have been denied benefits.

The partnership between Adam and Joe—a cross between shoe-leather detective work and strong preparation—won the day. "Adam was very optimistic because my case was

pretty much a done deal in his mind, it was strong and was backed with medical documentation, which in turn made his job that much easier," said Joe. "On the day of my hearing, Adam had told me my case was mine to tell, so he told me to get that across to the Judge. After the hearing Adam had said that I articulated my case so well that he was very optimistic about the outcome; he paid me a great compliment that I made this case an easy win for him, because of knowing it in and out."

For Adam's part, the search for medical evidence required persistence and tenacity. "That's what I do, I track down every piece of medical evidence, and I reach out (often repeatedly) to the doctors that treated Joe—I need their input, and Social Security needs their input—and very often I educate the local medical community as to their role in these cases. I often tell my clients that the social security judges care very little for what either of us has to say, but that they care a great deal about what their doctors have to say. I impress this on my clients from day one."

*continues on page 11*

### *Funding:*

The Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York is funded by grants from the Legal Services Corporation, the Interest on Lawyer Account Fund of the State of New York, United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, United States Department of Justice, New York State Legislature, New York State Office of the Attorney General, NYS Office of Temporary & Disability Assistance, NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services, Albany County Department for Aging, Fulton County Office for Aging, St. Lawrence County Office for the Aging, Washington County Office for the Aging, St. Regis Mohawk Tribe Office for the Aging, City of Saratoga Springs, New York State Bar Foundation, United Way of the Greater Capital Region, Albany Law School, Hunger Solutions New York, NYS Unified Court System Judiciary Civil Legal Services, Warren County, Albany County Department of Social Services, Schenectady Community Action Program, Joseph's House, City of Schenectady, City of Albany, City of Troy, New York State Attorney General Homeowner Protection Program, Internal Revenue Service, law firms, corporations and individuals through the Justice for All Campaign. LASNNY is a fair housing/equal housing opportunity provider of legal services.



# Service for the community

Ordinarily, keeping company with Bonnie and Clyde might be construed as “consorting with violent criminals,” but in the case of LASNNY board member, attorney Patricia Rodriguez, the aforementioned felons just happen to be her frisky Boston terriers. “They get me up and keep me going every day,” Rodriguez said.

Not that Patricia really needs the obligations of canine caretaking to fill up her schedule. A busy private practice attorney, Rodriguez works primarily in family courts in Albany, Schenectady, and Montgomery counties. She also serves as an impartial hearing officer for the State Education Department. “My career path has been a little unusual in that I did not go into litigation when I first got out of law school,” said Patricia. “I worked in state government for many years and went into private practice in 1998, thirteen years after graduating from law school, and started to do trial work.”

Patricia was born in Boonton, New Jersey, where she and her brother were raised by her immigrant mother, Emita Cerchione. Patricia credits her mother’s encouragement about the importance of education as a critical ingredient in her decision—at age 11—to become a lawyer. “My mother came to this country from Mexico. Her influence and amazing work ethic have motivated me throughout my life. My engagement in the practice of law is motivated by the desire to provide quality legal services to my community, especially minorities. Because I am the only bilingual attorney practicing law in

my county, I know the importance of connecting to my clients’ cultures. Their faces light up when I address them in Spanish and they know that



**My engagement in the practice of law is motivated by the desire to provide quality legal services to my community, especially minorities.**

I can understand them and they don’t have to rely on others to convey their message (which can literally be lost in translation!). It gives litigants confidence when they see people of color in positions of authority in the court system.”

Subsequent to her graduation from Douglass College of Rutgers University in 1979, Patricia went on to the University of Wisconsin Law School on a legal educational opportunities fellowship and graduated in 1985. That same year, she and her husband, Robert Colborn (who works at what is now the GE Global Research Center) moved to

Niskayuna, where they have raised their sons, Sam, 24, and Alex, 22.

“I’m proud to serve on the LASNNY Board,” said Patricia. “I would like to see the board work more on access to justice issues to ensure that LASNNY is reaching as many people as it can possibly serve, especially minorities who have language and cultural barriers that prevent them from accessing the justice system....And, we still have a very long way to go, but some progress has been made in increasing the number of women and minorities in the judiciary.” Patricia’s commitment to addressing this particular inequity drove her recent run for Schenectady County Family Court Judge (although her bid was not successful).

A longtime supporter of Legal Aid, Patricia values the engagement and service of attorneys in private practice to address the inequalities in the legal system that can leave poor people without proper representation. “It’s a pleasure to have Pat serve on the Board,” said Lillian M. Moy, LASNNY’s Executive Director. “She is a hard working Family Court solo practitioner, and brings a special perspective to the Board.”

## Legal Aid Society Board of Directors

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for their generosity.*

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# CAPITAL CAMPAIGN CHALLENGE

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## Saratoga Springs Capital Campaign

*continued from page 1*

“In my mind, donating time and money to provide legal aid to vulnerable populations is an ethical responsibility of all attorneys,” said E. Stewart Jones, Jr., President of LASNNY and Partner at E. Stewart Jones Hacker Murphy PLLC. “I’m delighted at the generous response to our building campaign, and sincerely grateful to all those attorneys who believe, as I do, that the Legal Aid Society is a necessary asset, and that this building will be able to expand its reach to help those less fortunate in Saratoga and beyond.”

At the time of this printing, the campaign had reached \$140,000, thanks in no small part to the Warren County Bar Foundation, which in-

**“...it’s important that we, as attorneys, do our part to make sure underserved populations have access to representation for the protection of their rights and needs.”**

—Trish Watkins, Warren County Bar Foundation

stituted a challenge grant to support LASNNY’s acquisition and rehabilitation of the property. Originally, the Foundation pledged to match funds up to \$15,000, and the Warren

County Bar Association was ready to accept the challenge.

“We had such a great response from the members that we increased our pledge an additional \$5,000,” said Patricia “Trish” Watkins, a member of the Foundation’s Board of Directors and a Principal at Bartlett, Pontiff, Stewart & Rhodes, PC. “I think it’s important that we, as attorneys, do our part to make sure underserved populations have access to representation for the protection of their rights and needs.

The Legal Aid Society is an established organization that does an excellent job of this.”

The Warren County Bar Association members pledged \$20,000 and the Foundation matched it for a total gift of \$40,000 to the campaign. The capital campaign has whittled down the principal on the new 15-year mortgage, resulting in considerable savings over the life of the loan,

enabling a more concerted focus on services.

“Thanks to our donors, we have expanded our practice of poverty law



*The Saratoga Bar Association gave a gift of \$7,500 toward the Capital Campaign. An additional one to one match for up to \$20,000 has been created by E. Stewart Jones and James T. Towne, Jr. for Saratoga County.*

into new arenas such as consumer and bankruptcy law, and returned to our roots of providing legal assistance to clients facing issues with the local Departments of Social Services,” said Mary Withington, supervising attorney at the LASNNY Saratoga Springs office. “I am confident we will reach our capital campaign goal with everyone’s continued generosity. We can’t thank them enough.”

## GUARDIANS OF JUSTICE

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Wendy L. Wahlberg  
G. Kimball Williams & Margaret. J. Gillis  
Mary Withington

## Joe Perry

*continued from page 8*

Joe Perry couldn’t have been happier with the outcome of his case, and he’s inspired to share his experience with others. “I received a phone call from Adam with the greatest of news: yes, the Judge had approved my disability claim! I was overjoyed and so were my children. I would most definitely recommend LASNNY to any person I know, especially any veterans. I am hoping that by telling my story, LASNNY can get more funds to help other veterans in these types of cases.”

Adam DeFayette has been working with LASNNY in the North Country for the last two years. “I think it’s a real privilege to be able to do this kind of work,” he added. “Legal Services is absolutely essential. Without a profit-motive, we can take important cases that would otherwise be cost-prohibitive. The work we’re doing is very high stakes for our clients—if we didn’t exist, there wouldn’t be anywhere to turn for help on these issues, and the results would be devastating.”

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**Congratulations to our new  
staff hired since January 1, 2015**

- Courtney Carey..... Canton
- David Galin.....Albany
- Rufus Burgess ..... Canton
- Kristen Ridgway..... Plattsburgh
- Heather Davis ..... Amsterdam
- Alexandria Pappas .....Albany
- Sam Wegleitner .....Albany

**Donate through the  
SEFA Campaign.  
Our SEFA number:  
50-00198**



*James Towne, a trustee of the Loisaba Community Conservation Foundation, with students at the Ewaso Primary School in the Laikipia Valley, 100 miles north of Nairobi, Africa. Jim and his wife Susan are lead donors to the Saratoga Springs Capital Campaign (see article on page 1 and photos on pages 6–7).*