

THE DAILY RECORD

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

Pro Bono SPOTLIGHT

VLSP vol embodies the spirit of the season

By **LINDA KOSTIN**
Daily Record Columnist

When it comes to volunteering to help low income clients with their civil legal needs, Eileen E. Buholtz has been in the holiday spirit since 1982, the year Volunteer Legal Services Project was established.

Since then, Buholtz has been a *pro bono* attorney, made calls for every Campaign for Justice (CFJ) and served on VLSP's board of directors for more than 20 years.

Honored by the New York State Bar Association in 2007 with Empire State Counsel Designation for donating at least 50 hours of *pro bono* legal services annually, Buholtz brings boundless energy to her volunteer activities. At this time of year, Buholtz, a partner at Connors & Corcoran LLP, enthusiastically volunteers her time and talents for CFJ. She called judges and lawyers to ask for pledges since the campaign's inception as a VLSP fundraiser in 1986.

Through the years CFJ's scope has broadened to provide funding for the Legal Aid Society and Monroe County Legal Assistance Center as well as VLSP, but its format has remained the same. Volunteers select cards with names of their colleagues to call. Sometimes it can be a little daunting to call and ask people for money — even if they are friends and acquaintances — but it's a skill in which Buholtz excels.

"I help give the pep talk before the volunteers start calling," she said recently.

Buholtz practices what she preaches, taking on the challenging job of calling members of the legal community who haven't donated to CFJ in the past.

"I can usually get some sort of contribution, even \$25. In relation to the donor's budget, that might be a huge amount," Buholtz said.

Buholtz is in a unique position to share the urgent need for legal services funding with the judges and attorneys she calls. Her law practice is concentrated in insurance defense and commercial litigation, but she also accepts referrals from VLSP for divorce cases because it's an area of great need.

Buholtz said she is comfortable handling complex divorces, in part because other members of the bar are available to mentor her, including Sara Stout Ashcraft of Ashcraft Franklin & Young

LLP, David Boysen of Harris Beach PLLC, and Angelo Calleri. "It's a win-win situation. There's no other family law scenario where the clients are actually grateful. I still get cards and presents from some of my VLSP clients. The judges are appreciative, too, because *pro bono* attorneys reduce the number of *pro se* litigants in the court system," Buholtz said.

Buholtz has been awarded VLSP's William E. McKnight Award and, in 1994, received the New York State Bar Association's President's *Pro Bono* Service Award.

During work on a recent VLSP case, Buholtz conducted one of the most memorable depositions of her career. A husband held his wife, Buholtz's client, captive for 12 hours and attempted to smother the her. When she tried to escape, her husband put her in a choke hold and dragged her back into the house.

"I got my client's husband to admit this at the deposition," Buholtz said. "Afterwards, he e-mailed my client and complained 'your *pro bono* attorney made me look bad.' I'm going to frame that e-mail and put in on the wall with my plaques."

On the day of trial, her client's husband withdrew his complaint. Buholtz's client was granted a divorce and received a favorable equitable distribution. Buholtz said most VLSP divorce cases are not complex.

"Frequently, the non-client spouse is equally amenable to ending the marriage," she said.

In addition to her service as a CFJ volunteer and *pro bono* attorney, Buholtz served on VLSP's board of directors from 1986 to 2007, and she continues to serve on the board's finance committee.

During the holiday season, many organizations ask for donations to their cause. Members of the legal and business community know firsthand the difference effective legal representation can make in a person's life, whether it's severing ties with an abusive spouse, getting a fresh start through bankruptcy or drafting a will. A CFJ donation provides funding for legal services in Monroe County. To make a pledge, call Sheila Gaddis at (585) 295-5701.

VLSP and ProBonoNY, an access to justice initiative of the New York State Unified Court System, wish to thank Eileen Buholtz and all of the members of the legal community who stepped up in November to help low-income clients cope with a

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wide range of issues including bankruptcy, wills, name changes, child custody cases and divorce. ProBonoNY provides funding for *Pro bono* coordinators throughout the state to continue to recruit wonderful volunteers.

November 2008 Honor Roll

Solo practitioners: Mary Aramini; Suzanne Brunsting; Paloma Capanna; Robert Mullin; Santash Pawar; Tracy Powell; Karen Rabinowitz; George Reiber; Michael Reifenstein; William Taylor and Gary VanGraafeiland.

Attorneys at firms: Diane Katz (Allen & O'Brien); Alan Biernbaum (Biernbaum, Inclima & Meyer LLP); C. Bruce Lawrence, Robert Nassau (Boylan, Brown, Code, Vigdor & Wilson LLP); Roberta Feldman (Gray, Feldman & Rosenbaum); Lynda Vandenberg (Hamberger & Weiss); Nicole Rossow (Harris, Chesworth, O'Brien, Johnstone, Welch & Leone LLP); David Boysen (Harris Beach PLLC); Steven Carling, Sara Marangola, Erika Stanat (Harter Secrest & Emery LLP); Warren Welch (Johnson, Mullan & Brundage PC); David MacKnight (Lacy Katzen LLP); John Larimer (Nixon Peabody LLP); Paul Missal (Pirrello, Missal, Personte & Feder); James Paulino II (Ward Norris Heller & Reidy LLP); Heidi Feinberg, Christopher Lindquist, Sarah Snyder Merkel, Elizabeth Wolford, James Wolford and

Michael Wolford (The Wolford Law Firm LLP).

Corporate attorneys: John Larimer and Toan Vo of Bausch & Lomb.

Law school graduates awaiting bar admission: Diana Holl (Harter Secrest & Emery LLP); Ashley Baker and Megan Thisse (Nixon Peabody LLP).

Paralegal students: Danielle Everets, Ruth Iver and Courtney Panek of Monroe Community College.



Eileen E. Buholtz

Linda Kostin is the Pro Bono Coordinator for the Seventh Judicial District's Pro Bono Action Now Program. Her office is located at Volunteer Legal Services Project of Monroe County Inc. Contact her at lkostin@wnylc.com or (585) 295-5703.