



PRO BONO At a Glance

Attorney Christopher F. Girard Assists Springfield, Massachusetts

Tornado Victims



Christopher F. Girard, litigation associate at Robinson & Cole, served as pro bono counsel to two Springfield, Massachusetts residents whose apartment building was destroyed by the tornado on June 1. Chris, who grew up in Springfield, called the Hampden County Bar Association to offer his services in the wake of the disaster.

The immediate need was greatest in the Springfield housing court, where the owners, tenants, and mortgagees of dozens of condemned commercial and residential properties were called into court to address the damage done to their buildings. Robinson & Cole was able to assist two young mothers who had lived in adjacent apartments in downtown Springfield before their building was irreparably damaged. What remains of the building is slated for demolition; unfortunately, many of these women's possessions not destroyed in the tornado were taken by looters.

Three weeks after the tornado, both women were still staying with their families in the temporary shelter set up in the MassMutual Center. Both lacked sufficient funds to sign a lease on a new apartment. For each, Robinson & Cole was able to negotiate an agreement with the landlord for a release from their tenancies and the return of their security deposits and other monies held by the landlord. For one client, the landlord waived a substantial rent

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Message from Ed Heath, Pro Bono Committee Chair



It has been said that if you want peace, you must work for justice. While every person is guaranteed access to our justice system, that access must also be meaningful. The Connecticut Judicial Branch has concretely expressed the point: "It is one thing to have the ability to walk into a courthouse and file a complaint against a landlord and quite another to have the necessary advocacy tools to ensure true representation."

For the last few months, Dwight Merriam and I have been serving on a committee established by Chief Justice Chase Rodgers of the Connecticut Supreme Court that is tasked with planning a Pro Bono Summit designed to help increase access to those necessary tools. Our committee is chaired by

arrearage and agreed to provide a reference letter to help the tenant find a suitable apartment. For the other client, the landlord agreed to repay the June rent as well as the last month's rent, which the tenant paid at the beginning of her tenancy. The agreements were presented for approval to the court, which accepted the agreements.

Pro Bono Partnership Honor

In the last issue of this newsletter, we reported that Robinson & Cole was selected as the only law firm among the Pro Bono Partnership's "Volunteers of the Year" for 2011. We are pleased to report that Robinson & Cole's selection has been reported in the May 2010 edition of The Metropolitan Corporate Counsel. According to its website, "MCC goes to an average of 22,500 corporate counsel at 8,500 individual business locations where corporate counsel practice, including all corporate counsel at Fortune 1000 companies who have an interest in receiving MCC." Articles and interviews published in MCC also appear on its website, which is approaching 1,000,000 hits and 35,000 unique viewers a month.

Attorney Peter R. Knight Provides Counsel through the Lawyers for Children America Program



Through the Lawyers for Children America program, Robinson & Cole partner Peter R. Knight is representing a one year-old Hartford child in a neglect and abuse case pending in Hartford juvenile court. The mother has a history with the Department of Children and Families (DCF). The client has five siblings, all of whom either are in the care of their biological father or have been adopted after a termination of parental rights. The DCF filed a neglect petition in the client's case after the child was found in a car, allegedly unattended by the mother. The child currently resides with both parents, who will be contesting the DCF petition.

Superior Court Judge William Bright, and its dozen or so members include current and former members of the Connecticut Bar Association, executive directors of two major Connecticut legal aid organizations, senior in-house lawyers, and large and small firm partners.

The Summit, scheduled for a half-day on October 5, 2011, will bring together members of the judiciary, general counsels of Connecticut-based organizations, and managing partners of many Connecticut law firms, including our own John Lynch. The Chief Justice will invite the General Counsels of approximately 40 corporations that have significant law departments in the state, including UTC, Pfizer, Aetna, Pitney Bowes, Northeast Utilities, MassMutual, Chemtura and Webster Bank.

Presenters will educate the audience on the state's existing pro bono needs and offer specific opportunities to help meet those needs. The goal is to obtain project commitments from the corporate and firm attendees. Depending on what works best for the individual attorney or firm, the commitment could include participation in a day clinic, staffing a hot line, or fully representing or participating in any of the pro bono programs that may be identified during the presentations.

The Summit is an exciting pro bono development, and we will be sure to report on its progress in upcoming issues of this newsletter.

Eastern Connecticut Housing Opportunities Represented by R & C Attorneys



Attorneys Timothy Bates, Maria Ackley and Evan Seeman recently represented Eastern Connecticut Housing Opportunities, Inc. (ECHO) in its appeal of the decision of the Norwich Board of Assessment Appeals regarding assessed values of properties it owns in Norwich, Connecticut. ECHO is a small

Massachusetts In-House Counsel Pro Bono Forum



On May 16, 2011, Robinson & Cole participated in a forum sponsored by the Massachusetts Access to Justice Commission that was held at the John Adams Courthouse in Boston. Ralph D. Gants, justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, cochaired the event. The topic of the day was successful strategies for initiating and sustaining pro bono initiatives in corporate legal departments, including partnering with attorneys from existing law firms with pro bono programs. Christopher S. Pitt, the Boston office member of the firm's Pro Bono Committee, represented Robinson & Cole.

Working on pro bono matters with in-house counsel helps to bridge the widening gap between those in our society who are unable to afford needed legal services and society's willingness and ability to provide such services. In addition, it provides unique networking opportunities for law firm attorneys to build personal relationships that can positively impact the firm's business relationship with corporate clients. The law firm/in-house counsel partnership can also help to overcome procedural hurdles that have discouraged corporate pro bono efforts, including concerns over storage of and access to client files and state in-house registration rules that limit corporate counsel from providing noncorporate legal services to the public.

non-profit provider of affordable housing in southeastern Connecticut that is active in both the development of ownership housing for first time homebuyers and in providing rental housing at below-market rents. ECHO took exception to how the assessments of its properties were calculated, claiming the process did not accord with Conn. Gen. Stat. § 8-216a, which provides a formula to value low or moderate income housing. ECHO therefore appealed to the Board, which instead of following § 8-216a, markedly increased the assessments. Attorneys Bates, Ackley and Seeman then became involved in the case, and they brought an appeal challenging the Board's valuation. After ECHO realized that the original assessments, while not in accord with the statute, resulted in actual taxes that were close to those which would have been paid if the statute had been followed, Bates, Ackley and Seeman approached the City and negotiated a settlement based on the reinstatement of the original assessments. Although ECHO no longer has the right to challenge those assessments until the next reassessment year, it did reserve the right to ensure that § 8-216a is applied to any new buildings that it acquires.

Stephen E. Goldman Chairs Training Session for Legal Aid Lawyers

Stephen E. Goldman, partner and litigation attorney at Robinson & Cole, was cochair of a one-day training session sponsored by the Connecticut State Committee of the American College of Trial Lawyers. Attorney Goldman presided over a lengthy program that included a role-playing clinic, with some of the state's best-recognized practitioners as faculty. Over 50 legal aid lawyers from the state attended and participated in a variety of trial practice exercises.



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