

THE DAILY RECORD

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

Pro Bono SPOTLIGHT

Clearing the bankruptcy backlog

Halloween is drawing near and Volunteer Legal Services Project has received a real treat.

Lucien A. Morin II, a partner at McConville Considine Cooman & Morin PC, has committed to taking four VLSP bankruptcy case referrals at a time until the current 22-case backlog is cleared.

Given the current economy, Morin's commitment is extraordinary. The 10 cases he already accepted constitute more than \$15,000 in donated legal services. Morin recently explained the factors that lead to his decision.

"I was brought up to give back to the community," he said. "VLSP serves a population that needs assistance. Third, [Former Chief Judge Judith S. Kaye] said lawyers are expected to do *pro bono*."

Morin also said he believes more could be done by members of the bankruptcy bar to assist low-income clients in our community.

"Bankruptcy practitioners have a responsibility to help. If every member of the bankruptcy bar took one VLSP case per year, there would be no backlog," said Morin, who concentrates his practice in the areas of bankruptcy, commercial law and real estate.

As a long-time VLSP volunteer, Morin he has observed a recent demographic change in clients.

"The middle class is creeping down. People who would not have been eligible for VLSP's services before the recession are eligible now, often due to job loss."

Single mothers and grandmothers raising grandchildren comprise the majority of VLSP's bankruptcy clients.



Morin

Regardless of their particular situations, Morin's VLSP clients have something in common: "They have not only the need but the desire to put their financial house in order. They don't want to repeat the process in eight years."



By LINDA KOSTIN

Daily Record
Columnist

In addition to his dedicated service as a volunteer, Morin is a member of VLSP's Bankruptcy Advisory Committee, which is considering expanding its Debt Collection Advice Clinic to include a *pro se* bankruptcy clinic.

"We are looking to see if there are any alternatives that can assist with reducing the case backlog and help people move through the process faster," Morin said.

Pro bono assistance from bankruptcy attorneys still will be required if a *pro se* clinic is implemented. Clients will continue to require guidance on dischargeability issues, for instance, he said.

"VLSP staff members have a genuine sense of wanting to help volunteers get the job done. The intake process is extremely thorough, which reduces the amount of time needed to complete the case."

Morin has offered to mentor attorneys who are new to bankruptcy practice.

For those uncertain about accepting a referral, Morin suggests volunteering to deliver the Power Point presentation constituting the first part of VLSP's Debt Collection Advice Clinic. Morin will be educating VLSP clients about the bankruptcy process on Nov. 3.

Regardless as to which *pro bono* opportunity is chosen, volunteering offers its own rewards.

"Doing *pro bono* makes you feel good. As a firm, when we do *pro bono*, it shows our clients and colleagues that we care about our community," Morin said.

Seasoned volunteers like Morin and those new to *pro bono* all can join VLSP, the MCBA and *Pro Bono NY* for *Pro Bono Idol* (with apologies to "American Idol"), a fun twist on a traditional *pro bono* fair being held in conjunction with the American Bar Association's week-long National Celebration of *Pro Bono*. The law firms of Hiscock & Barclay LLP, Harter Secrest & Emery LLP and Woods Oviatt Gilman LLP already have registered for "auditions" featuring presentations from VLSP, the Arts and Cultural Council, Farmworker Legal Services of New York, Habitat for Humanity, Catholic Charities of Wayne County and the Legal Aid Society of Rochester.

The Oct. 27 lunchtime audition slot remains open. Interested firms are welcome to contact me to register.

Solos and small firms are invited to attend an Oct. 30 audition from 12 to 1 p.m. at the Rubin Center for Education, 1 W. Main St., fifth floor, and lunch will be provided. Contact me to register.

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Continued ...

The group with the most attorneys in attendance will be named *Pro Bono Idol*. Read next month's column to find out who are winners are.

Thanks to all who attended the opening reception for the Art of Lawyering silent auction. Bidding on art created by legal professionals and their friends continues through Nov. 18, the last evening of Campaign for Justice. Visit www.vlsprochester.org or stop by our offices during business hours to view available items.

Thanks also to all of the members of the legal community who stepped up last month to help low-income clients cope with a wide range of issues including bankruptcies, wills, name changes, unemployment insurance benefits denials, grandparent/non-parent child custody, adoptions and divorces:

September 2009 Honor Roll

Solo practitioners: Jason Bowman; Mark Drexler; Phillip Hurwitz; Francis Mahan; Lisa Maslow; Lisa Morris; Tracy Powell; Thomas Rohr; Subrata Paul; Jon Stern; Gary Van Graafeiland and Paul Watkins.

Attorneys and paralegal at firms: Stuart Levison (Allen & O'Brien); David Hou, C. Bruce Lawrence, Christopher Werner

(Boylan Brown); Natella Reinstein (ChamberlainD'Amanda); Thomas Hartzell Jr. (Finucane & Hartzell); Maureen Alston, Steven Carling, Diana Holl, paralegal Melanie Lavacca (Harter Secrest); Lucien Morin (McConville Considine Cooman & Morin); Patrick Simpson (Nixon Peabody); Hope Olsson (Olsson & Feder); Paul Missal (Pirrello Missal), John Harris (The Harris Law Firm); Robert Brennan (Trevett Cristo); Rachel Brody Bandyck (Underberg & Kessler) and Andrew Dick (Zwicker & Associates).

Corporate attorneys and paralegals: Brian O'Connor (Kodak); Michael Giuliano and paralegal Karen Drysdale (Thomson Reuters); Gary Cohen and paralegal Karen Messina (Xerox).

Government attorneys: Kim Taylor (Appellate Division, Fourth Dept.); William Taylor (Monroe County).

Paralegal students: Judy Bartnett, Carol Blake, Daniel Behrnt, Mary Lynne Casey, Rosa Hamlin, Joan Jackson, Jen Leary, Jennifer Palmesano, Courtney Panek, Jill Routly, Camille Sconfitto, Mary Sears and Lena Vassallo (Monroe Community College).

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.; lkostin@wnylc.com; (585) 295-5703