

SPEAKING OF JUSTICE

News From The Florida Bar Foundation

volume 7

issue no. 1

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PETE CROSS

Henry Wilson, right, turned his life around with help from Equal Justice Works Fellow Amanda Sejba, who helped him get his Veterans Administration benefits restored.

Medical-legal partnership answers veterans' needs, changes lives

When Henry Wilson's VA pension was cut from \$1,000 to \$65 a month due to clerical errors, the lost income put him into a downward spiral that only reversed when a young lawyer and fellow Army veteran intervened and got his benefits restored.

Equal Justice Works Fellow Amanda Sejba, whose work at Coast to Coast Legal Aid of South Florida is supported by The Florida Bar Foundation, The Florida Bar, and the international law firm of

Greenberg Traurig, stayed on Wilson's case until she was able to reach a supervisor who personally reviewed his file and recognized the errors.

Wilson, 60, had been forced to move out of his home when he couldn't pay the rent. Homeless, unable to work because of a disability, and with little hope, he went on drinking binges that only made matters worse. His repeated attempts to get the VA to correct the problem had gone nowhere. But his fiancée, Lillian, stuck by him, and so did Sejba.

Wilson remembers clearly the day he found out that Sejba had managed not



Leadership and Funding for Justice in Florida

see **VETERANS**, p. 6

Message from the president

Buzzwords often sound important, but soon evaporate. Phrases like “think outside the box” or “interdisciplinary approach” suffer from overuse. Also popular in the public vernacular were “transparency” and “engaged.” During this year, our board and Executive Director Bruce B. Blackwell have restored true meaning to those shibboleths.

When I became president of the Foundation, we faced a cornucopia of problems: a dire money shortage; a change in leadership; the need to secure a loan from The Florida Bar; and a petition put before the Florida Supreme Court to increase Bar dues to support legal aid programs. To put it mildly, our constituents were not happy. In fact, some of them were in a state of rebellion. They wrote that we were insensitive to their plight and the need to retain tenured legal aid attorneys. Most important to me, they questioned the Foundation’s credibility and integrity.

In response, we opened our office doors and invited grantees and board members to visit our offices and meet our colleagues. We responded to each and every question with factual information and personal contacts. We sought input and solutions to our pressing funding issues. Because we have been transparent in our communications, answering every question and speaking to groups when asked, our credibility and integrity have been restored and enhanced. I have been approached by legal aid board members and directors, attorneys, and community members who take time to thank me for the “openness” of the Foundation board and our colleagues. They were talking about our staff colleagues in our Maitland office.

I asked why they felt we were open. They could only say it was a feeling based on how they were treated and how their questions were answered.

As a result, there has been a renewed commitment to The Florida



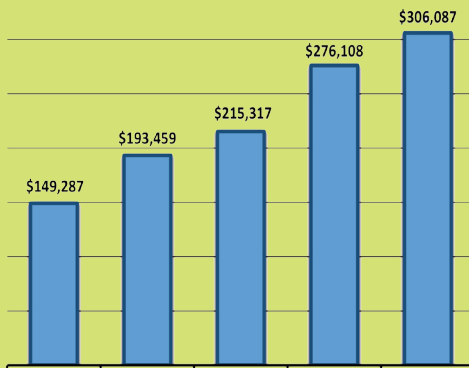
Hon. Emerson R. Thompson Jr.

Bar Foundation and the work we do. Although we still struggle because of diminished funding, our constituents and members of The Florida Bar realize that our decades-long commitment to serve the legally underserved remains steadfast and has not and will not change.

Emerson R. Thompson, Jr.

Hon. Emerson R. Thompson Jr., President
The Florida Bar Foundation

Lawyers' support for Children's Legal Services is growing



Donations to Children's Legal Services through The Florida Bar fee statement campaign have doubled since 2010.

Florida Bar Foundation grantees helped thousands of Florida kids with autism secure the right to Medicaid coverage for the most effective form of therapy. That's just one example of how your gift could transform children's lives. It's easy to donate on The Florida Bar annual fee statement or online.



One of every four
Florida children lives
in poverty.



When you help a child
overcome barriers, you unleash
a lifetime of potential.

Donate by credit card at www.FloridaBarFoundation.org/children

New access commission shares Foundation's primary goal

The Florida Bar Foundation's mission of providing greater access to justice is now the goal of a commission created last fall by administrative order of Florida Chief Justice Jorge Labarga and funded by The Florida Bar.

The 27-member Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice is studying the unmet civil legal needs of disadvantaged, low-income, and moderate-income Floridians and will recommend ways to address them systemically.

"In establishing and funding this commission, Chief Justice Labarga and Florida Bar President Greg Coleman have demonstrated their commitment to the Foundation's fundamental purpose," said Florida Bar Foundation President Emerson R. Thompson Jr., a member of the commission and a senior judge on the Fifth District Court of Appeal. "We really couldn't ask for much more than that."

The Foundation is one of the primary partners behind the commission, working alongside The Florida Bar, the Florida Supreme Court and the Office of the State Courts Administrator.

Foundation President-elect Donny MacKenzie, a commission member, believes the outcomes will protect the rule of law in Florida, as well as the state's people and economy.

"By acknowledging that the need for meaningful and reasonable access to justice is a societal issue, we can make systemic, non-partisan and well-informed change for everyone's benefit," MacKenzie said.

MacKenzie serves on the commission's Access to and Delivery of Legal Services subcommittee, which is chaired by William A. Van Nortwick Jr., a past president of the Foundation and past chair of the Florida Bar Standing Committee on Pro Bono Legal Services.

Van Nortwick said the subcommittee will look at traditional and nontraditional approaches to increasing access.

"While my crystal ball doesn't show me what changes in the justice system will be made as a result the commission's proposals, I am confident we will see greater use of technology; more court simplification and procedures to assist self-represented litigants; the use of institutions outside the courthouse, such as public libraries, in delivering legal assistance; and more effective use of pro bono and legal aid attorneys to represent parties with the most serious legal problems," Van Nortwick said.

Commission member Kathy McLeroy, also a past Foundation president, can draw on her experience as co-chair of the Bar's pro bono committee and a member of the Bar's Vision 2016 committee.

"We have on the access subcommittee a cadre of current and past Florida Bar Foundation leaders who are steeped in the issues and determined to effect change," Thompson said.

Serving along with them is Jim Kowalski, executive director of Jacksonville Area Legal Aid, one of the Foundation's 30 legal aid grantees. At the commission's first meeting Jan. 16, Kowalski acknowledged that change can be daunting, but he expressed optimism.

"If there's anything I've learned from participating with the members of this panel, it's that this is a huge opportunity, and certainly among this group there is a huge desire to assist in that change," he said.

Thompson is chairing the funding subcommittee, which will look at a wide range of possibilities for increasing financial support for civil legal aid from private and public sources.

Other subcommittees will focus on technology, outreach, and the continuum of legal services. Each has staff support from the Bar, the Court and the Foundation.

The commission is charged with submitting an interim report to the Court no later than Oct. 1, and a final report and



COURTESY OF THE FLORIDA BAR

Foundation President Emerson R. Thompson Jr. addressed the media at a Nov. 24 press conference announcing the establishment of the Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice.

recommendations no later than June 30, 2016. The administrative order requires that in its final report the commission "should include recommendations on the need for the establishment of a permanent access to justice commission in Florida."

As in other states, some of which have access to justice commissions dating back to the 1990s, Florida's commission is envisioned as a permanent body that will continually work to improve the system based on its own studies and recommendations, as well as innovations that have proven successful elsewhere.

"A two-year term is not the end of the commission," Labarga said in a Jan. 30 interview with The Florida Channel. "What I envision is for this commission to be in place for a long time to keep studying ways to do this better and to include as many people as possible."

Van Nortwick to receive Medal of Honor Award June 25

Jacksonville attorney William A. Van Nortwick Jr., formerly a judge on Florida's First District Court of Appeal, has been selected to receive The Florida Bar Foundation's 2015 Medal of Honor Award, the Foundation's highest award.

Partner-in-charge of Akerman LLP's pro bono program and a member of the Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice, Van Nortwick is being honored for his decades of work contributing to the infrastructure for pro bono and legal services organizations in Florida.

"In addition to performing legal work for the poor, Bill served in leadership capacities in virtually every organization related to or supporting pro bono and legal aid," said Tampa attorney Kathy McLeroy, who has served alongside Van Nortwick. "As a member of the judiciary, he served as a role model for other judges, encouraging them to actively promote pro bono work from the bench. He was instrumental in the formation of a pro bono committee in the Business Law Section of The Florida Bar and in developing and implementing the One Campaign to promote pro bono work in Florida, and he presided over the first statewide Pro Bono Week in Florida."

Van Nortwick is a past president of The Florida Bar Foundation and was a director and two-term president of Foundation grantees Jacksonville Area Legal Aid and Florida Legal Services. He is immediate past chair of The Florida Bar's Standing Committee on Pro Bono Legal Services, on which he has served since 1997, and previously chaired The Florida Bar/Florida Bar Foundation Joint Commission on the Delivery of Legal Services to the Indigent, which led to the creation of rules requiring reporting of pro bono hours. He also chaired The Florida Bar's symposium on equal access to justice, whose recommendations led to the first state funding for civil legal aid.

Van Nortwick's own pro bono work began during his first year in private

practice at the Jacksonville law firm of Milam, Martin and Ade, which he joined in 1970 straight out of law school at the University of Florida. In one of his early cases he helped represent three African-American students who were expelled from school following a racially charged incident on a school bus. The students were eventually reinstated. He later put in more than 200 pro bono hours helping establish a medical clinic in an underserved Jacksonville neighborhood.

"Bill was instrumental in securing as a gift from the Jacksonville Area Chamber of Commerce a prominent building in downtown Jacksonville which we were able to convert into offices of Jacksonville Area Legal Aid," wrote John A. DeVault III, who served on the JALA board with Van Nortwick in the 1970s.

Van Nortwick received the American Bar Association Pro Bono Publico Award in 1995 and 10 years later was the first recipient of the Florida Supreme Court Distinguished Judicial Service Award. He also has been honored with The Florida Bar Pro Bono Award for Florida's Fourth Judicial Circuit, the Thurgood Marshall Award for Florida's Second Judicial Circuit, the Robert Beckham Equal Justice Award from Jacksonville Area Legal Aid, the Pro Bono Award of The Florida Bar Appellate Practice Section, and The Florida Bar President's Award of Merit.

He has served on the Florida Supreme Court Professionalism Commission, chaired the District Court of Appeal Performance and Accountability Commission and is the current chair of The Florida Bar's Business Law Section.

"Simply put, Bill Van Nortwick, by his constant and consistent dedication to service, elevates everyone in the room, whether the room is a conference room, an appellate courtroom, the State Capitol, or the State Bar," wrote Jim Kowalski, executive director of Jacksonville Area Legal Aid and a fellow member of the Florida Commission on Access to Civil Justice.



William A. Van Nortwick Jr.

"His enthusiastic approach to pro bono easily convinces those with whom he comes in contact that pro bono is an essential element of the practice of law."

**– Katherine E. Giddings
Akerman LLP**

39th ANNUAL RECEPTION & DINNER

Medal of Honor Award sponsored by
Florida Lawyers Mutual Insurance Company

June 25, 2015

Boca Raton Resort & Club

Cocktail reception at 6:30 p.m.

Dinner at 7:30 p.m.

Invitations will be mailed and online ticket purchase will be available in May.

Tickets can also be ordered at \$100 per person with the reply card at www.FloridaBarFoundation.org/rsvp

Please send the completed reply card with your check to:

The Florida Bar Foundation
875 Concourse Parkway South, Suite 195
Maitland, FL 32751

Foundation to honor Jaramillo posthumously

Florida Bar Foundation President Emerson R. Thompson Jr. will present the President's Award for Excellence to Julio C. Jaramillo posthumously at its annual dinner June 25 at the Boca Raton Resort & Club.

Jaramillo, 48, passed away Jan. 19 after battling lymphoma for several months.

"He was a charismatic leader that everyone was eager to follow," said Senior Judge Emerson R. Thompson Jr., the Foundation's president. "He is sorely missed by all who knew him and all who know the importance of access to justice for the most needy in our society."

Jaramillo was president-elect of the Foundation when his illness forced him to defer his service. He had also been vice chair of The Florida Bar's Vision 2016 Access to Legal Services Committee, on which he worked closely with Adele Stone,

the committee's chair and a past president of the Foundation.

"During his time with the Bar, he committed himself to the causes of the poor in more ways than his service on our committee and the Foundation," Stone wrote in a message to Bar and Foundation leaders. "Julio Jaramillo touched the community, the Foundation and The Florida Bar and we all enjoyed his presence for too short a time."

Jaramillo is survived by his wife, Patricia, his sons Julian, 4, and Joaquin, 2, his brother, Dr. David Jaramillo, and sisters Patricia Rubio and Elaine Mangia.

An education fund has been set up to benefit Julian and Joaquin. Donations should be made payable to: "Mainstay Funds" and sent to: Cristina Martinez, 7700 N. Kendall Dr., Suite 203, Miami, FL 33156.

The President's Award for Excellence is sponsored by Shutts & Bowen LLP.



Julio C. Jaramillo

Jane Curran to be honored for her service

The Florida Bar Foundation has established the Jane Elizabeth Curran Distinguished Service Award to honor Curran for her 32 years as the organization's founding executive director.

Curran will be the first recipient of the award in recognition of her contributions to the Foundation, to the national IOLTA movement, and to access to justice statewide and nationally. She was recruited to The Florida Bar Foundation in 1982 to lead the organization as it launched the nation's first Interest on Trust Accounts program, which was authorized by the Florida Supreme Court in 1981.

"Jane made this Foundation a national leader," said Foundation President Emerson R. Thompson Jr. "She led the efforts to make the state's IOTA Program mandatory, to achieve interest rate comparability so that IOTA accounts earn the same interest rates available to similar bank customers, and to create innovative grant programs to improve legal services delivery."

Curran was not only the Foundation's executive director, but also the director of its Improvements in the Administration of Justice Grant Program, which has helped launch or fund a number of important projects, including the Innocence Project of Florida. The award will be presented June 25 at the Foundation's annual dinner and is sponsored by Stanley and Susan Rosenblatt.



Outstanding children's advocates to be recognized

Florida's Children First will receive the 2015 Paul Doyle Children's Advocacy Award for its Counsel for Dependent Children with Special Needs Project, which secured the right to counsel for dependent children in five categories through HB 561. First runner-up is Gulfcoast Legal Services for its GLS Child Project, and second runner-up is the Medicaid to Age 26 Project of Florida's Children First and Florida Legal Services. The biennial award is sponsored this year by Akerman LLP and named for the Foundation's longtime director of Legal Assistance for the Poor and Law Student Assistance grant programs in recognition of his commitment to high-quality legal representation of low-income children. The award will be presented at the Foundation's annual dinner June 25.

only to get his monthly benefit restored, but also to recover for him a lump sum to cover 10 months of missed payments.

"I was on Cloud Nine," Wilson said. "I said, 'Amanda did it!' "

Just before he got Sejba's call with the news that the payment would finally come, Wilson and Lillian, who is now his wife, were "grumping around the house, wondering how we were going to pay the bills," he said. Lillian was in tears. The couple had been living off of Lillian's Social Security alone, and it simply wasn't enough.

Without a car, Wilson had to rise at 5 a.m. and walk two miles to one South Florida VA facility in order to catch a bus to another where he attended classes to help him get over his PTSD and substance abuse. He had to walk 10 blocks to and from the store carrying bags of groceries, a trip Lillian, a retired nurse, could not make herself, having had two knee replacements.

With the back pay, they were able to buy a used car, and with his monthly benefit restored, they now hope to buy a modest home with a VA loan.

"It changed my life," Wilson said. "I can see a better way now. I can see a future. I am now at ease with myself, and with the people around me, and I'm grateful."

Dr. Phillip Greenberg is chief medical officer of the William "Bill" Kling VA Clinic in Tamarac, where Sejba staffs the Veteran Advocates Legal Outreach & Representation (VALOR) medical-legal partnership through legal aid. Greenberg worked with then-Coast to Coast Legal Aid of South Florida staff attorney Jayme Cassidy to establish the partnership, which makes legal assistance available to veterans at the clinic.

Under the terms of the partnership, Sejba and her supervisor, Laurie Yadoff, can help clients with VA benefits appeals like Wilson's from their own office in Plantation, but they can do intake and provide other types of legal assistance



"I can see a future. I am now at ease with myself, and with the people around me, and I'm grateful," said U.S. Army veteran Henry Wilson, shown here with his wife, Lillian.

PETE CROSS

from an office within the clinic. They often help with family, employment, and immigration law matters. Homeless veterans, some of whom are legal permanent residents but not citizens, sometimes have immigration problems when they lose their documents because they don't have a safe place to keep them. This can have a domino effect when it comes to finding a job or securing housing.

"We just really worked hard as a group to get this started," Greenberg said.

The very first week the program was running, Greenberg encountered an elderly veteran and his wife whose son and daughter-in-law were both addicted to oxycodone. The grandparents were taking care of their grandchildren but didn't have legal custody.

"They were in tears," Greenberg said. He referred them to the medical-legal partnership, which in turn referred the couple to a pro bono attorney who helped them get custody.

"It just sold me even more so on a personal level," Greenberg said. "They are just answering a lot of the veterans' financial and legal needs and allowing us to do our job of providing health care. By freeing that part of the patient's minds up, they enable me to start to have a conversation about hypertension or

diabetes or heart disease and really focus on treating the patient."

Sejba is grateful to The Florida Bar Foundation and its funding partners, The Florida Bar and Greenberg Traurig, for funding her two-year fellowship. Greenberg Traurig contributed half of the \$112,000 cost.

"Without them we wouldn't be here because it's so hard to get funding," Sejba said.

She is not sure what she will do when the fellowship is over in August, but she would like to stay on as a staff attorney. Coast to Coast Legal Aid has been looking for grant funding to enable Sejba to continue her work. According to a 2014 report by Washington, DC-based Equal Justice Works, which provides leadership to ensure a sustainable pipeline of talented and trained lawyers involved in public service, 72 percent of Florida's Equal Justice Works fellows continued to work in public interest jobs after their fellowship was over, and 66 percent remained in Florida. But with legal aid funding in such short supply, it's getting harder to retain legal aid talent.

Wherever Sejba ends up, she knows it will be in the nonprofit sector.

"I definitely want to stick with veterans' law," said Sejba, who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom. "I see such a great need."

Thank you to our 39th annual dinner sponsors

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Florida Lawyers Mutual Insurance Company

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Stanley and Susan Rosenblatt

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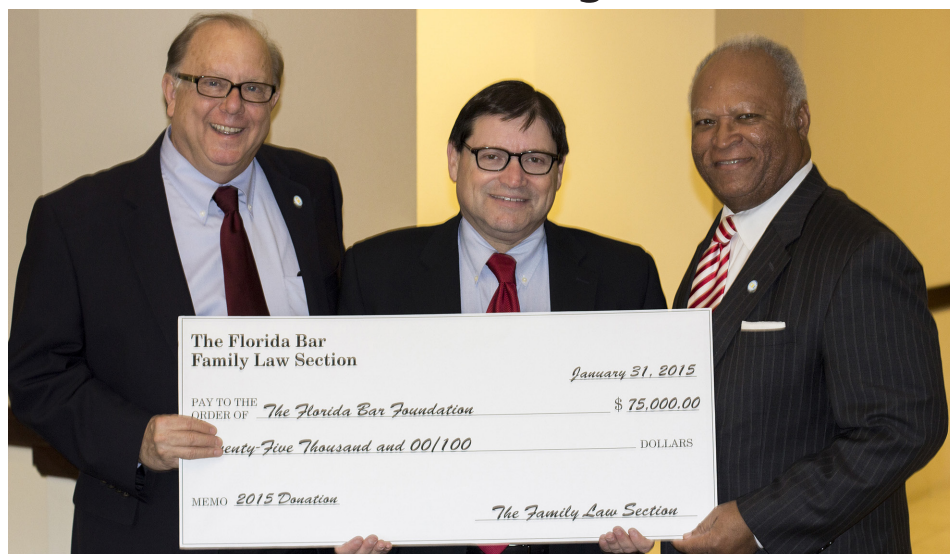
Family Law Section makes its second \$75,000 gift

The Florida Bar's Family Law Section Jan. 31 made a \$75,000 gift to The Florida Bar Foundation, its second such contribution in three years.

"As family lawyers, we understand the vitally important role The Florida Bar Foundation plays in ensuring access to justice for Florida's low-income families, its foster children and its children with special education or medical needs," said Family Law Section Chair Norberto Katz. "Supporting the Foundation's grantmaking is an effective way that we, as a section, can fulfill our professional oath to never reject the cause of the defenseless."

The Family Law Section was among the first Florida Bar sections to step forward with major gifts, as awareness began spreading of the precipitous decline in legal aid funding available through Florida's Interest on Trust Accounts (IOTA) program, which the Foundation administers. The section made a \$75,000 gift in 2012 to support the Foundation's Children's Legal Services grants.

"The Family Law Section is a wonderful ally for The Florida Bar Foundation," said Foundation President Emerson R. Thompson Jr., a senior judge on the Fifth District Court of Appeal. "We appreciate that their leadership



Florida Bar Foundation CEO Bruce Blackwell, Family Law Section Chair Norberto Katz, and Foundation President Emerson R. Thompson Jr., a senior judge on the Fifth District Court of Appeal, celebrate the Family Law Section's \$75,000 gift to the Foundation.

places such high value on our mission of providing greater access to justice for the last, the least and the lost, and we are grateful for their faith in our good stewardship. It's worth noting that about 30 percent of legal aid cases involve family law."

The Florida Bar Foundation is the second-largest funder of Florida's legal aid organizations, providing about 19 percent of the \$85 million they received from all sources in 2013. With the decline

in IOTA revenue requiring a 78-percent reduction in the Foundation's grants since 2010, the federally funded Legal Services Corporation is now the state's largest legal aid funding organization, providing 21 percent of the Florida's total legal aid funding in 2013. However, many legal aid programs do not receive Legal Services Corporation funding, which is subject to Congressional restrictions, and therefore rely more heavily on Foundation funding.

Florida Justice Technology Center to launch

Under the terms of its \$6 million loan to The Florida Bar Foundation, The Florida Bar Board of Governors stipulated that a third of the loan be used, "primarily for the creation of an independent statewide nonprofit technology entity." The Florida Justice Technology Center will increase access to justice through the use of innovative technology and train and support legal aid providers and pro bono attorneys in its use. Foundation consultants Joyce Raby and John Graecen are preparing for the center's launch later this year. Graecen has consulted to courts in 40 states and facilitated the 2013 national Summit on Legal Aid Technology for the federal Legal Services Corporation. The former legal aid technology coordinator for the Washington State Bar Association, Raby co-founded the national LSC Technology Innovations Grant Program. Raby and Graecen have been holding listening sessions around Florida involving legal aid grantees, the private bar, the courts, law firms, law schools and others. Before going to Florida Bar and Foundation leadership, a draft business plan, which includes strategies for the center's long term sustainability, will be reviewed by volunteers from the Business Law Section's pro bono committee, who will also handle all incorporation-related activities.

SPEAKING OF JUSTICE

CONTACT THE FOUNDATION

(407) 960-7000
(800) 541-2195 (Toll free in Florida)

EXECUTIVE

Bruce B. Blackwell, CEO/Executive Director
bblackwell@FloridaBarFoundation.org

Jane Elizabeth Curran, Executive Director Emeritus

DEVELOPMENT

Donna Marino, Development Manager
dmarino@FloridaBarFoundation.org

COMMUNICATIONS

Nancy Kinnally, Director of Communications
nkinnally@FloridaBarFoundation.org

FINANCE, ADMINISTRATION & IOTA OPERATIONS

Lou Ann Powell, Director of Finance, Administration & IOTA Operations
lapowell@FloridaBarFoundation.org

Lushawn Phillips, IOTA Operations Manager
lphillips@FloridaBarFoundation.org

GRANTS

Melissa Moss, Director of Grant Programs & Development
mmoss@FloridaBarFoundation.org

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