

GULFCOAST NEWS

SERVING PINELLAS, PASCO, HILLSBOROUGH, MANATEE, AND SARASOTA COUNTIES



TO PROVIDE
CIVIL LEGAL ASSISTANCE
FOR PERSONS WHO
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1750 17th Street, Unit I
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9309 N. Florida Ave.
Suite 109
Tampa, FL 33612
(813) 490-9411

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GULFCOAST LEGAL SERVICES, INC.

SPRING 2010



Director's Corner

John P. Cunningham, Esq.
Executive Director

As international travelers recently learned, a geologic event like a volcano in a remote area of the globe can have a widespread impact. The earthquake in Haiti in January also left many Haitian nationals in the United States unable to return to homes, jobs or the essentials of life. Our government has responded with relief efforts in Haiti and has authorized the granting of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to eligible Haitians residing here who apply by July. Our immigration unit has been assisting Haitians in the region with advice and assistance in applying for TPS, and will continue while conditions in Haiti do not allow the return to homes, jobs or the other essentials of life.

At the same time, GLS was awarded a BRAIVE Fund grant and initiated a new project to assist veterans of the current Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. Our efforts will focus on the legal needs of these courageous military veterans and their families as they return home to confront the effects of injuries and a difficult economy.

We also proudly report in this issue on the outstanding work of our staff and volunteer attorneys in foreclosure matters, affordable housing and immigration matters.

GLS Receives Steven M. Goldstein Award

Gulfcoast Legal Services has been selected for one of three 2010 Steven N. Goldstein Awards for its program *Obtaining Justice for Homeowners Victimized by Foreclosure Rescue Scams*. The current foreclosure crisis has given rise to various foreclosure rescue scams that deprive homeowners of their title and then their residence through unconscionable lease terms in a sale lease-back with option to purchase package. The project was created to enforce remedies that victims of these rescue scams would not otherwise obtain and to deter future scams.

GLS attorneys recognized for their continued work on this project are Elizabeth M. Boyle, Sarasota managing attorney, Joseph Broadus, St. Petersburg predatory lending attorney, and volunteer attorney James McDonald.

John Cunningham, Executive Director stated, "We congratulate our housing staff, whose outstanding work has been recognized by the selection committee." The award is given every other year by The Florida Bar Foundation. This is the first time that GLS has been selected for the prestigious award.

Other awardees are The Florida Equal Justice Center, Legal Aid Society of Palm Beach County and Florida Legal Services for their project *A Challenge to the City of Lake Worth's Use of Selective Code Enforcement Against Guatemalan Mayan Families*, who placed first and will receive \$25,000 plus a \$3,000 training scholarship. First runner-up was Florida Legal Services for their project *Migrant Farmworker Justice Project (minimum wage and employment law violation in the south Miami-Dade County bean industry)*. They will receive \$10,000 plus a \$1,000 training scholarship. GLS will receive \$5,000 plus a \$1,000 training scholarship. Formal awards will be presented to the winners at The Florida Bar Foundation Annual Dinner in Boca Raton on June 24.



Elizabeth M. Boyle, Esq.



Joseph Broadus, Esq.

Visit our website... www.gulfcoastlegal.org

AIMilitary Legal Advocacy Project

With more than 20,000 veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan in Pinellas, Manatee and Sarasota Counties, the AIM (Afghanistan-Iraq Military) Legal Advocacy project was developed to benefit the lives of those serving and those who have served in these conflicts, as well as their family members, who are in need of civil legal assistance.



Kenneth V. Wilson, Esq.

The project will provide free legal advice, counsel, education and representation with regard to pre-deployment and post-deployment issues. Areas of legal service are: accessing Social Security and veterans benefits, housing matters including foreclosure, consumer matters, accessing health care and mental health resources, employment rights and family and domestic abuse concerns.

Heading up the project is attorney Kenneth V. Wilson, a graduate of the New England School of Law in Boston and a Navy veteran. Before coming to GLS Mr. Wilson was a federal attorney with the U.S. Coast Guard and NHTSA, and most recently, in private practice. He is licensed in Maryland and Florida and is certified for practice before the Veterans Administration. Ken may be reached at the Sarasota office 941-366-1746 or toll free 1-800-780-1746.

Gulfcoast Legal Services' Afghanistan-Iraq Military (AIM) Legal Advocacy Project is made possible by funding from the Florida BRAIVE Fund at the Gulf Coast Community Foundation of Venice.



Helping Floridians impacted by deployment to Afghanistan & Iraq

'Nou La' Legal Advocacy for Haitians



Peterson St. Philippe joined Gulfcoast Legal Services in September 2009 as the Florida Bar Foundation Equal Justice Fellow heading the 'Nou La' project, an advocacy and outreach project. 'Nou La' is Creole for 'We Are Here'. The project serves Haitian communities in Pinellas, Pasco, Hillsborough, Manatee and Sarasota counties. Peterson is originally from Haiti and is fluent in Haitian Creole, a skill much needed in the immigration field. Peterson received his B.S. degree from Florida State University in 2006, and his J.D. from Stetson University College of Law in 2009. Before joining GLS as an attorney in 2009, Peterson worked as an immigration intern in the GLS St. Petersburg office during the spring of 2008.

Peterson St. Philippe

GLS Responds to Haiti Earthquake Crisis



Claire St. Jacques

The Immigration Unit at GLS has responded to the Haitian crisis caused by the January earthquake by starting a program to help Haitian immigrants with filing their Temporary Protected Status (TPS), which was authorized by an emergency ruling by the U.S. State Department. GLS was ideally positioned to take on this project because of the 'Nou La' project already in place and led by Peterson St. Philippe, Esq. a Haitian Creole speaker and Florida Bar Foundation Equal Justice Fellow. To help with the TPS program GLS added Claire St. Jacques in the St. Petersburg office and Valdine Heck at the Family Justice Center in Tampa who are also Creole speakers. All three have extensive experience working with the Haitian community living in the Tampa Bay area. TPS allows Haitians living in the United States to get work authorization on a temporary basis. This will enable those Haitians living here without other immigration status to help their family members back in Haiti. Enrollment to TPS is open through July 20, 2010. Applicants may call 727-821-0726 or 1-800-230-5920 for an appointment. The program is funded in part by an emergency fund grant from The Florida Bar Foundation.

Mission Statement

Gulfcoast Legal Services is a regional non-profit organization dedicated to providing comprehensive, personal legal advocacy, counseling and education for vulnerable individuals and families.

Affordable Housing Grant Renewed

The Florida Bar Foundation approved refunding the Affordable Housing Project which GLS attorney Christine Allamanno recently began to develop in Pinellas County in June, 2009. "During this time of record unemployment and reduced income for families in Pinellas County, I am proud to be able to continue legal advocacy for safe, decent, and affordable housing on behalf of our low income families," Christine said.

Christine has spent much of her first year on the project learning the ins and outs of the Florida Mobile Home Act and working with low income residents of mobile home parks to better their parks from abusive management practices and to preserve them from sale to developers. "Mobile home parks are the largest source of unsubsidized affordable housing in the state," Christine stated. "If the parks go away, the residents become homeless. They can't afford even the cheapest of 'affordable' apartments."

Between 2000 and 2005, at least ten mobile home parks in Pinellas were converted to upscale residential housing or commercial development. Noting that trend has slowed somewhat Christine commented, "We need to make the most of this downturn in order to put protections into place which will preserve the remaining mobile home parks in Pinellas." Christine's work in a mobile home park in Clearwater, which is home to mostly Spanish speaking residents was described in a front page article in the St. Petersburg Times in December, 2009. In February 2010 she co-wrote an article with Jaimie Ross, the President of the Florida Housing Coalition, for its publication "Housing News" about statewide mobile home park preservation efforts in Florida and featured parks in which Chris had worked.

Christine hopes that, years from now, we will be able to point to some affordable housing in Pinellas that we helped to preserve for our low income families.



Christine Allamanno, Esq.

GLS Clients Have Voice in Creating Federal Legislation

The Department of Housing and Urban Development is proposing new legislation which will consolidate the existing 14 different rental subsidy programs into one streamlined, effective program called Transformation of Rental Assistance. In December 2009, in an effort to write meaningful legislation, representatives of HUD called for applications from renters and community partners to assist in the planning process.

Two GLS clients who had just experienced a particularly difficult period of trying to find housing with their Section 8 vouchers agreed to be heard, but only if their attorney Christine Allamanno, Affordable Housing Project coordinator, would join them. Together they submitted the required application and were chosen to participate in the process along with 120 other tenants and community partners across the United States. Over the next few months all the representatives participated in teleconferences and webinars to get up to speed on the proposed legislation and to discuss their experiences and concerns with subsidized housing.

HUD then invited all participants to come to Washington, D.C., April 13-14, for two full days of talks with Department representatives. Sean Donovan, Director of Housing and Urban Development, also met with the tenants and community partners to make sure that their voices were heard. Mr. Donovan stated that the language of the legislation which is being sent to the Hill by the end of April will be a direct result of their influence. This is the first time that new federal legislation has had such comprehensive input from the people most affected by the legislation.

Special Thanks to our New Volunteers

Angela Bellamy, Paralegal
Elliot L. Dozier, Esq.
Nancy E. Feehan, Emeritus Attorney
Eileen Walsh Normile, Emeritus Attorney
Jack Robinson, Emeritus Attorney
Denis Gries
Ed Hurley
Renee Lewis
Marianne Lutisan
Eugene Murphy, Esq.
Jake Okanuma
Dave Rosenberg, Attorney
Katsuaki 'K.C.' Suzuki, Esq.



Volunteer 'KC' proud
to have passed the Bar exam.

Help GLS provide
Equal Justice for all
and satisfy your
Florida Bar Pro Bono
Public Service
Requirement

*Details coming soon
in the mail!*





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Comments or suggestions
should be directed to:

Liz Williams
Director of Development

641 First Street South
St. Petersburg, FL 33701
727-821-0726 x 125
727-821-3340 Fax
Lizw@gulfcoastlegal.org

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641 First Street South
St. Petersburg, FL 33701

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Welcome!

Valdine Heck is working part-time with the TPS program at the GLS Tampa office. Claire St. Jacques is the new assistant in the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) program in St. Petersburg.

Elizabeth Ann Stevens, LITC assistant, is making outreach presentations for the tax program and assisting with client cases.

Ken Wilson, Esq. is the AIMilitary project attorney in the Sarasota office. See more on about Ken and the AIM project on page 2.

Patricia Santiago is the secretary at the GLS office at the Family Justice Center.

Congratulations!

Bradenton receptionist Griselle Leon and her husband Henry Zaldivar recently welcomed their second daughter Aalijah Zaldivar who joined big sister Zurie Zaldivar.



GLS Board Member Evelyn L. Moya, Esq. has been elected President of the Commission on the Status of Women in Sarasota. Evelyn is



also a newly appointed member of the Board of Trustees for the Sarasota County Law Library. On June 24 Evelyn will be inducted into the Women Leaders in Law by the Florida Association for Women Lawyers.



Sarasota office Managing Attorney Elizabeth M. Boyle has been elected to the Sarasota County Civic League Board of Directors. She will be installed as President Elect at the May meeting.

*Have you remembered
Gulfcoast Legal Services
in your estate planning?*