

A Publication of Community Legal Resources

Community Legal Resources' Fifth Anniversary Celebration

In November 2003, Community Legal Resources celebrated five years of connecting lawyers and communities in Michigan at an appetizer and cocktail reception at Ford Field in downtown Detroit. Nearly 200 volunteer lawyers, nonprofit clients, public officials and financial institution representatives attended the event at which awards were presented to key CLR supporters over the past year.

Former Wayne County Prosecutor Michael Duggan praised the work of CLR's nonprofit clients and volunteer lawyers in creating safer, cleaner neighborhoods in Detroit. He presented the Law Firm of the Year award to Dan Share, a partner at Detroit law firm Barris, Sott, Denn & Driker P.L.L.C. in recognition of the firm's outstanding commitment to CLR and its nonprofit clients. Since 1998, nearly half of the firms' 33 lawyers have taken pro bono cases through the CLR program, handling everything from simple incorporation matters to complex negotiations with governmental agencies and private developers.



Sam Smith, President of Jefferson/Chalmers Citizen District Council, praises Louis Rochkind for his pro bono efforts.

Duggan presented the Financial Partner of the Year Award to Mark Neithercut of the Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan in recognition of early and sustained support of CLR and of the nonprofit organizations and neighborhoods served by CLR volunteer lawyers. The Community Foundation provided start-up operating support to CLR and later provided the funding used to launch CLR's direct education initiative.



From left: CLR Executive Director Angie Zemboy; Louis Rochkind, Jaffe, Raitt, Heuer & Weiss P.C.; Mark Neithercut, Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan; CLR Board Chair Sally Schwartz; CLR Board Member Steve Tobocman; and Dan Share, Barris, Sott, Denn & Driker P.L.L.C.

Finally, Butzel Long attorney and Chair of the Michigan Democratic Party Melvin "Butch" Hollowell made remarks from the perspective of a corporate attorney involved in community work. Hollowell presented the "Steven H. Tobocman Award for Outstanding Volunteerism" to Louis P. Rochkind of the law firm of Jaffe, Raitt, Heuer & Weiss P.C. Rochkind—a 30 year veteran at Jaffe Raitt practicing bankruptcy and financial services law—took on a number of complex

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Young Detroit Builders' Executive Director Beverly Manick (right) thanks CLR Board member Robin Luce and her pro bono team at Butzel Long, P.C.

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and time-consuming cases for CLR in 2003 and serves on CLR's Finance Committee where he secured new sources of funding for the agency.

Beverly Manick, Executive Director of Young Detroit Builders, and Sam Smith, President of the Jefferson/Chalmers Citizens District Council, spoke from the perspective of client

organizations which benefited from CLR's services in 2003. Manick thanked Robin Luce and the team of lawyers at Butzel Long who help her on almost a daily basis with employment, insurance and general corporate matters. Smith praised Louis Rochkind for successfully resolving a lingering legal issue that had slowed the group's activities in its eastside Detroit neighborhood.

Community Legal Resources board and staff members congratulate the awardees and thank everyone who has contributed to our first five years of success!



Attorneys Carl Stafford, Bodman Longley & Dahling, L.L.P.; Damali Sahu, Bodman, Longley & Dahling, L.L.P.; and Carolee Cameron, Miller, Canfield, Paddock & Stone, P.L.C. enjoy the event



Former Wayne County Prosecutor Mike Duggan (right) presents the Law Firm of the Year Award to Dan Share of Barris, Sott, Denn & Driker P.L.L.C.

Special thanks to the evening's sponsors:

Michigan State Housing Development Authority
Johnson Controls
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Bodman Longley & Dahling attorney Clark Doughty honored for his volunteerism

Community Legal Resources recognized the extraordinary volunteerism of Clark Doughty, partner with the Detroit law firm of Bodman, Longley & Dahling LLP, as its volunteer for the fourth quarter of 2003.

Over the past several months, Clark has volunteered to assist two Detroit area nonprofit organizations. The first organization Clark agreed to work with was The Lord of Lords Community Center, an organization on the east-side of Detroit. The Community Center offers a number of services to the local community, some of which include: a free summer camp for the neighborhood youth; a weekly feeding program; and offering clothing to whoever needs it. The organization has found that there is huge demand for its services in the



BODMAN, LONGLEY & DAHLING LLP

surrounding neighborhoods. As a result of this demand it chose to purchase an adjacent building to house its surplus food and clothing and to free up some additional space. After attempting to purchase the building on its own, the organization quickly realized that it needed the expertise of a seasoned real-estate attorney to help advise on the deal. Clark generously agreed to volunteer his time and efforts and has gone above and beyond the call of duty working on the transaction.

In addition, Clark recently worked with The Community Development

Corporation of Warren. Established more than six years ago, the CDC of Warren builds and re-habilitates housing for low to moderate income families in South Warren. The organization recently found itself with the opportunity to acquire additional property in its target area with the potential for one house to be overhauled and two new houses built. Once again, Clark stepped forward and volunteered his valuable expertise to help a local nonprofit organization with an important real-estate transaction.

As a result of these impressive efforts, Community Legal Resources recognized Clark Doughty of Bodman, Longley & Dahling, LLP as Volunteer of the Quarter for the fourth quarter of 2003.

Client Spotlight – The Blind and Visually Impaired Children’s Fund

The Blind and Visually Impaired Children’s Fund (BVICF) is a new organization providing recreational and educational opportunities, along with medical equipment, to visually impaired children in the Detroit public school system. Started by three local teachers, BVICF has been working with blind and visually impaired children in a number of different areas. Earlier this year, the organization sponsored a weekend camping trip to Lapeer, Michigan. Most of the children had never experienced camping before and participated in various arts and crafts activities, nature hikes, fishing, educational lessons and boat rides. BVICF has many more future trips in the works, including a trip to Chicago.

Two other programs available through BVICF include: assisting blind and visually impaired children attend school field trips by helping defray the costs and offering funds for children who cannot afford equipment needed to improve their vision.

BVICF requested from Community Legal Resources assistance with reviewing its Articles of Incorporation, bylaws and application for tax-exempt status. Detroit lawyer Stephanie Fishman, from the law firm of Butzel Long, graciously agreed to help and is currently working with the organization.



Children enjoy a field trip organized by BVICF

Policy Report

by Katy Locker, Staff Attorney

Land Bank Fast Track Act Signed Into Law January 5, 2004:

Revised Bill Allows Detroit and Other Cities to Determine Their Own Land Bank Strategy

A six-bill, bipartisan legislative package was approved by the House and Senate and signed by the Governor to create a State Land Bank Fast Track Authority and to authorize the creation of local land bank fast track authorities. The legislative package represents the first steps toward an innovative approach to getting land into productive hands and relieving the state and local units of tax reverted parcels. The legislative package provides the structure for a state and local land bank fast track authorities (“authorities”) but the operation and agenda of each authority will largely be determined by each government unit (State, city, or county) upon its establishment of each authority.

Public Act 258 (HB 4483) is the core of the Land Bank Fast Track Act. PA 258 establishes a state land bank authority that will be used to process tax reverted properties for the State of Michigan. On a local level, Public Act 258 enables (but does not mandate) the establishment of city and/or county land bank authorities upon the execution of an intergovernmental

agreement between the city or county and the State Land Bank Fast Track Authority.

An authority (whether state or local) is accorded the right to hold and manage property (sale, lease, renovation, demolition, etc.). In addition to acquiring tax reverted properties, an authority could purchase property, could receive property as a gift in lieu of back taxes and penalties from delinquent property owners, or could receive property by transfer from another governmental unit.

An authority may borrow money, issue bonds, solicit grants, and retain proceeds it receives from the sale or rental of property in order to execute its responsibilities. Separate acts (PA 263 and PA 260) provide a mechanism for the authority to receive 50% of property taxes on authority-sold property for five years after the authority’s disposition of the property. This mechanism will insure resources are dedicated to the redevelopment of distressed urban properties. The remaining 50% is distributed in pro rata shares to the

entities that would otherwise receive the tax revenue.

In addition, PA 258 establishes a process by which title clearance and foreclosure proceedings may be accelerated in order to reintroduce neglected property to the housing market.

Five other bills (PA 259/HB 4480, PA 260/HB 4482, PA 261/HB 4481, PA 262/HB 4488, and PA 263/HB 4484) were passed to implement the necessary changes to the law to make the land banks work. You may view the full text of these and other bills at www.michiganlegislature.org.

Community Legal Resources (CLR) invites you to join a Yahoo Groups listserv that will facilitate information sharing and discussion on this and other land disposition issues. To join, go to groups.yahoo.com/group/DetroitLand and click on “Join This Group” or contact Katy Locker, CLR Staff Attorney, at klocker@michiganlegal.org.

New staff attorney to advocate for nonprofits, address land issues

Community Legal Resources welcomes Katy Locker as our new staff attorney. A Cornell University and University of Michigan Law School graduate, Katy moved to Detroit from a California law firm in December to take the position, be closer to her family in Midland, and refocus her career on public interest law.

During her first year with Community Legal Resources,



Katy will focus on helping nonprofit organizations address the utilization of vacant and abandoned land in Detroit and other cities in Michigan. She will use legal strategies and involve volunteer lawyers to impact public policy affecting the disposition of publicly-owned land and helping nonprofit organizations bring more neighborhood land back into productive

use. Recent changes in Michigan law around accelerated tax-foreclosure, local land banks, code enforcement, and the collection of delinquent property taxes have created opportunities for real change in urban communities, and Katy will bring stakeholders together to find creative ways to take advantage of these and other initiatives. Please send comments or ideas to Katy at klocker@michiganlegal.org and look for her regular column in this newsletter.

CLR's Community Development Library

Volunteer lawyers and nonprofit community groups are encouraged to take advantage of Community Legal Resources' Community Development Library containing hundreds of books, manuals and sample documents addressing nonprofit governance, tax questions, real estate development and other issues important to the work of community economic development. Titles and topics will soon be available online at www.clronline.org. Contact Katy Locker at (313) 964-4130 or klocker@michiganlegal.org to see what's available or to arrange a time to review or copy materials.

Community Legal Resources is a joint project of Michigan Legal Services and the Pro Bono Committee of the Business Law Section of the American Bar Association working in conjunction with the Michigan Litigation Assistance Partnership Program.

Our mission is to foster pro bono legal representation for unfulfilled legal needs of nonprofit community organizations in Michigan that serve low-income individuals and communities, with an emphasis on community economic development activities.

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