

Lawyers in Ithaca, White Plains, Albany and New York receive Denison Ray Award

The Department of Pro Bono Affairs announced the recipients of the Denison Ray awards, presented biennially to legal services staff attorneys who have distinguished themselves in providing criminal or civil representation to low-income clients.

President Kenneth G. Standard of Chappaqua (Morgan Lewis & Bockius, LLP) said, "This year's recipients exemplify the special commitment lawyers have made to society to represent the poor and disadvantaged regardless of their ability to pay."

Recognizing outstanding public service

The awards are given in three categories: civil legal services, criminal defense, and legal services provided by a non-profit organization. The purpose of the awards is to recognize outstanding public service staff attorneys who provide criminal and/or civil representation to low-income and disadvantaged clients, and an outstanding nonprofit organization that serves as a civil legal services leader helping to ensure access to justice for all.

The recipients in the civil legal services category were Sarah Betsy Fuller, staff attorney for Prisoners' Legal Services, Ithaca – awarded posthumously; and Judith Studebaker, staff attorney, Legal Services of the Hudson Valley, White Plains. The recipient in the category of indigent criminal defense was Alfred O'Connor, staff attorney, New York State Defender's Association, Albany. inMotion Inc., of Manhattan, was the recipient in the non-profit entity category.

Award named for renowned advocate

Each individual award recipient received a cash award of \$250 and one year's free membership in the NYSBA. The recipient of the nonprofit entity award received a cash award of \$1,000 to be used to support the organization's pro bono efforts.

Denison Ray was a renowned legal services advocate and director of the Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York.

The NYSBA Department of Pro Bono Affairs supports pro bono activities statewide and a variety of NYSBA access to justice initiatives. The term "pro bono," derived from the Latin phrase pro bono publico, meaning "for the public good," encompasses among other things, donated legal services to the poor and disadvantaged.

Award Recipients

Civil Legal Services category: (Awarded posthumously) Sarah Betsy Fuller, staff attorney, Prisoners' Legal Services of New York.

Nominated by Tom Terrizzi, executive director, Prisoners' Legal Services of New York.



Photo by Rosalie Cicogna

Pictured l-r: Patricia K. Bucklin, NYSBA executive director; Helaine Barnett, president, Legal Services Corporation; Barbara Finkelstein, executive director, Legal Services of the Hudson Valley and chair of the Partnership Conference Steering Committee; Assemblywoman Helene E. Weinstein who, along with Sen. John DeFrancisco, was honored for support of civil legal services; Anne Erickson, executive director, Greater Upstate Law Project, and NYSBA President Kenneth G. Standard.

Fuller was a prisoners' rights advocate employed by Prisoners' Legal Services of New York, a state-funded organization, headquartered in Ithaca, established after the Attica prison riots in 1971.

She was instrumental in achieving two court decisions that protected inmates' civil rights. In 1999, a federal case established the right of Native Americans to practice their religion freely in all 70 of the state's prisons. Inmates could conduct ceremonies, possess medicine bags and other religious items and make daily prayers in the traditional manner. In 1995, she filed a lawsuit to stop corrections officers from videotaping the strip searches of female prisoners at the Albion Correctional facility. The state Department of Correctional services paid compensation to 85 women. She also wrote two books on landmark U.S. Supreme Court cases in a series for teenage readers.

Civil Legal Services category: Judith Studebaker, staff attorney, Legal Services of the Hudson Valley.

Nominated by Mary Grace Ferone, managing attorney, Legal Services of the Hudson Valley.

Judith Studebaker, a housing specialist who has worked for LSHV (formerly known as Westchester Putnam Legal Services) for 28 years, represents clients in local housing courts, in administrative proceedings initiated by government agencies seeking to terminate federal housing benefits and in appeals. She handles more than 200 cases a year and has had many important appellate victories. In one recent appeal, the Appellate Term for the Ninth Judicial District held that a landlord who failed to offer the

required renewal lease was deemed to have renewed the lease by his actions. The decision is particularly important for tenants who live in rent stabilized apartments that require the landlord to offer a lease renewal.

Studebaker's work is grounded in recognizing that poor and low-income persons may experience many problems, such as accessing benefits and education, but without a stable home, none of these issues can be properly addressed.

Criminal Legal Services category: Alfred O'Connor, staff attorney, New York State Defenders Association.

Nominated by Charles F. O'Brien, managing attorney, New York State Defenders Association.

As a staff attorney at NYSDA's Public Defense Backup Center, O'Connor provides research and support services to more than 5,000 public defense lawyers throughout the state. He is called upon daily to assist public defense lawyers on practically every aspect of criminal defense representation.

He has improved the quality of defense advocacy through writing and training. He is the author of numerous articles on the impact of new criminal justice legislation, sentencing law, parole representation, and the Sex Offender Registration Act. He has developed a particular expertise in the intricacies of sentencing law and is regularly sought after to review particularly complex sentencing proposals or to calculate complicated jail time credit problems. O'Connor is a frequent lecturer and serves as a member



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Anne Erickson, executive director, Greater Upstate Law Project; Sen. John DeFrancisco, and, Barbara Finkelstein, executive director, Legal Services of the Hudson Valley.



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Barbara Finkelstein, executive director, Legal Services of the Hudson Valley; Professor Beverly McQueary Smith of the Touro Law Center, and; Judith Studebaker, winner of a Denison Ray award.

of the Chief Administrative Judge's Advisory Committee on Criminal Law and Procedure.

Nonprofit Organizations category: inMotion, Inc. of New York.

Nominated by William T. Russell, co-chair of the Pro Bono Committee, Simpson Thacher & Bartlett; LLP.

For more than a decade, inMotion, Inc., has built an innovative model for delivering pro bono matrimonial and family legal services to low-income, under-served, and abused women in New York. If not for this kind of representation, thousands of women would almost certainly have proceeded without legal counsel in court and without access to essential legal protections – orders of protection against abusive husbands and partners; fair divorce judgments; appropriate custody/visitation arrangements; and adequate child support orders; for example.

The success of the inMotion model lies in the fact that it relies on pro bono volunteers from major law firms, in-house corporate legal departments, and solo and small firm practitioners.

The organization's small in-house staff devotes all of its time to support pro bono volunteers and those women who can achieve successful outcomes by handling their cases pro se with guidance and support from the staff. More than 4,000 attorneys have been trained by inMotion and taken cases referred to them.