SEMINOLE COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION LEGAL AID SOCIETY

Annual Report 2020-21 Fiscal Year

SERVING THE COMMUNITY AND ENHANCING ACCESS TO CIVIL JUSTICE IN SEMINOLE COUNTY SINCE 1975

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Our fundraiser theme this year is "Back to the Future". It seemed like a fitting theme after all we endured during these past few years. We had to get back to the future by creating new viable paths and new patterns of working to face our new realities as a result of COVID-19.

We are fortunate in getting 'back to the future.' We have strong support from an amazing and compassionate board of directors, who offers our program leadership, guidance and resolve during a time of crisis.

Our legal community has been tremendous. We received a 7 % increase in lieu of service donations from the prior year and had significant offers of pro bono legal assistance. The number of hours donated to assist vulnerable members of our community increased by approximately 60 %. A pro bono attorney was instrumental in establishing an outstanding zoom virtual sealing and expungement legal workshop. It is held monthly in conjunction with Goodwill. Our first Emeritus attorney, former judge and veteran (whose naval job was to sweep for land mines), began assisting our clients with their housing legal needs.

Our technology provider, Territo, migrated all of our data to Microsoft's cloud services through OneDrive. We shifted our procedures on appointments and client interaction, and began doing conferences and signings via zoom and teams, and used adobe for official documents and correspondence. Our clients have embraced this change as it has made it easier to access our services. Territo also upgraded our in-office wireless services and security infrastructure, bringing all of our in-office computers onto Microsoft's new E5 platform integrated with OneDrive and Intune. These changes resulted in a superior, efficient and highly accessible legal services.

This year, we were awarded the prestigious Saint Martin de Porres award for our services to the community by the Catholic Attorneys Guild. Saint Martin is the patron saint of social justice. The award recognized our staff for their provision of quality legal services to low income and vulnerable residents of Seminole County. Our program assists the poor, the physically abused, the disabled, the elderly, neglected children and veterans. Our staff is active in the community serving on numerous local advisory committees and tasks force such as the Affordable Housing Advisory Committee, Seminole County Human Trafficking Task Force, Child Abuse Prevention Task Force, Domestic Violence Task Force and the Seminole County Children's Cabinet.

We are blessed with strong donors who support our mission and have robust partnerships with our local social service agencies such as Meals on Wheels etc., Goodwill, Safehouse, Heart of Florida Mission United Veterans Taskforce and Christian Sharing Center. We also have a special project with Embrace Families to strengthen the lives of disabled foster youth.

We are your local legal aid program in Seminole County. Please review the following pages to learn more about our work and services. Thank you for your help and consideration. I wish you a peaceful and prosperous 2022.

Jelina McLain

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MISSION

Seminole County Bar Association Legal Aid Society opened our doors in 1975.

We provide high quality civil legal services and education free of charge to disadvantaged and low income residents of Seminole county so as to protect their personal safety, promote their self-sufficiency, and improve their quality of life.

For many, we provide their only access to the judicial system to resolve critical legal problems.

We assist:

- Survivors of domestic violence
- Veterans, who need to resolve a civil legal matter
- Relatives seeking custody of minor children when parents are addicted to opioids
- Families of disabled children requesting appointment as guardian advocate when their child turns 18 years of age
- Elderly people seeking legal help to preserve their housing
- Disabled foster youths needing to obtain Medicaid waivers
- Unemployed persons seeking the sealing and expungement of an eligible crime to obtain a job
- Economically disadvantaged parents wanting to obtain a safe timesharing plan for their child and support to financially care for the child

In addition, we also administer the pro bono attorney project in Seminole County which expands our ability to help additional Seminole County residents with their legal needs. We also participate in several special legal projects, members of domestic violence and child abuse prevention taskforces, Seminole County Affordable Housing Advisory Board and Seminole County children's cabinet.

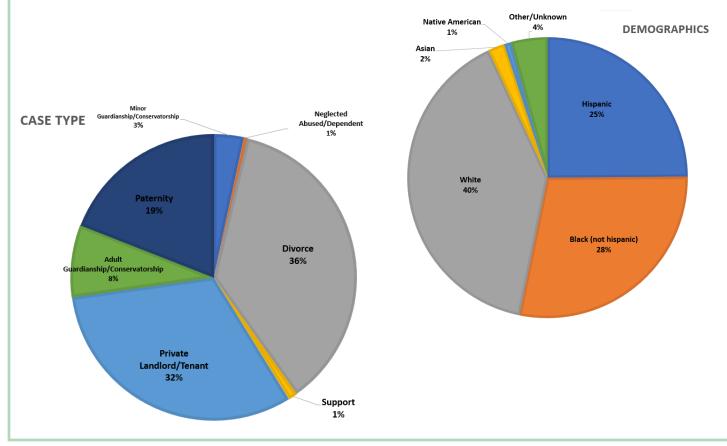
All legal services are provided in Seminole County to benefit our clients, their children and our community. We are the local legal aid program in Seminole County.

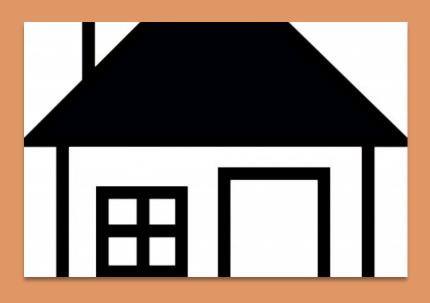
ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Our services are provided through the unified efforts of excellent pro bono attorneys, experienced staff attorneys, devoted and compassionate support staff, volunteer college students, and strong leadership of a dedicated board of directors. As a result of this collaboration, we can provide legal assistance in various areas of the law such as family, housing, guardianship of the disabled, juvenile, elder, and sustain legal workshops and legal advice clinics.

This past fiscal year, our volunteers and staff attorneys served **981 families**, including **1126 children**, with their legal needs. We obtained court orders establishing child support in the amount of **\$325,513** to sustain vulnerable families. Volunteer attorneys donated pro bono legal services valued at an estimated **\$220,535.00** and contributed **\$34,075.00** in lieu of service donations.

Below is charts concerning type of cases handled and demographics of our clients.





Attainable Housing Project

Seminole county along with the rest of the country is facing a growing affordable housing shortage. Home prices are rising at twice the rate of wage growth, and according to US census data have risen faster than inflation. Rents have increased over 20% this year which leave many residents to pay more than 30% of their income on rent. Households paying more than that are considered "cost burden." The lack of affordable housing leads to community instability and in some cases even homelessness.

Our attainable housing legal project makes available a full range of free legal options ranging from legal advice, pro se assistance to full representation in court proceeding to assist vulnerable and low income residents of Seminole County with their housing legal issues such as evictions and unlawful detainer. The provision of these legal services helps the clients make important decisions concerning their housing to assure stability for their families.

An example of a client assisted in this project involves Leah and her 3 children. Leah was served with an eviction. Leah was struggling to pay the rent from loss of income due to the covid pandemic. She owed 4 months in back rent and her lease was due to expire in May. Leah and her three daughters had nowhere else to go. By the time Leah contacted our office she had received a writ of possession and would have 24 hours to move out. The attorney immediately assisted Leah by filing a notice of appearance and an emergency motion to stop the writ citing the covid protection laws existing at the time. The Judge granted the motion to stop the writ but Leah was still in jeopardy of having to move as her lease would soon expire and the landlord did not want to renew the lease without her becoming current with what she owed. Our office advised Leah to apply for Emergency Rental Assistance through Seminole County to see if they would be able to help. She applied and was approved. The Emergency Rental Assistance program was able to assist Leah become current with her rent and the landlord renewed the lease. Leah and her three daughters were able to stay in home. Leah was so thankful for our services.

We assisted 310 residents of Seminole county with their serious and debilitating housing legal problems.

The VOCA Legal Project

At some point in our lives nearly all of us will know someone affected by domestic violence regardless of race, ethnicity, or income. The pandemic caused an increase of domestic violence as reported by domestic violence shelters in Florida.

Our legal program assists victims of domestic violence. We provide free legal assistance to the survivors with their urgent legal issues such a injunctions for protection, dissolution of marriage, child support, timesharing schedules, paternity and other family law matters. Our goal is to empower victims and help them escape violence, safeguard their children and rebuild their lives.

Last year, we assisted approximately 434 physically abused residents with array of free legal services ranging from legal advice, pro se assistance and representation in court proceedings and mediations.

We obtained court order awards of approximately \$325,513 in child support and alimony to enhance the self sufficiency of our clients and their children.

An example of one of our cases in this project includes Hollie and her daughter.

TOGETHER WE CAN BREAK THE SILENCE AND GIVE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE A VOICE

Victims of Crime Legal Project



Hollie applied for assistance with a dissolution of marriage action against her estranged husband who had committed several acts of domestic violence against her and their young, special needs child. Hollie's Husband also threatened to and committed acts of self-harm resulting in his arrest and an involuntary commitment accomplished through a Baker Act proceeding. After a lengthy separation and continued concern for unresolved timesharing issues, Hollie was in need of resolution. Our office provided representation to Hollie in obtaining a dissolution of marriage from her abusive Husband. With our assistance, Hollie filed for and obtained, at trial, a Final Judgment of Dissolution of Marriage which provided her with sole parental responsibility and supervised/restricted timesharing for the Husband. Hollie also obtained an order of child support, equitable distribution of their martial debts and the relief of knowing that the marriage to her abusive, violent husband had ended.

Disabled Child Legal Assistance Project

Families with developmentally disabled children, such as intellectually disability, downs syndrome, and autism, face many challenges and obstacles in caring for their child. One of their legal obstacles occurs when the child attains the age of 18 year old. At that age, the child is presumed by law to be able to make their own decision. However often, a developmentally delayed child needs additional assistance with health and every day matters. For the parents to gain the ability to be able to legal assist the child with decision making, the parent must seek to be appointed Guardian Advocate of the child. Our legal program provides FREE legal assistance for vulnerable and low income parents with Guardian Advocacy matters. Last year, we assisted 80 Seminole County families with the appointment as Guardian Advocate or their filing of their annual reports with the court.

An example of one of our clients assisted in this legal project includes the case of Isabella. Thirteen years ago, we assisted Isabella with her appointment as Guardian Advocate of her intellectually disabled son, Mitchell. He has Down Syndrome. Mitchell relies on Isabella for his physical well-being and safety. During these years, we would see Isabella and Mitchell at our office for their appointment to assist them in completing their annual reports required by Florida law. The reports would be filed in court for judicial review and approval.

Isabella, now at the age of 78, and having endured the hardships of a global pandemic, did not have the physically capability to continue to care for her son. Isabella approached us, once again, and asked for legal assistance in transferring the guardianship of Mitchell to her eldest daughter, Naomi. We immediately agreed to assist her and obtained the necessary waiver of conflict and consent documentation and then proceeded to represent Naomi in the transferring of the Guardianship of Mitchell to Naomi. At the end, both Isabella and Naomi were grateful for the help they received from the Seminole County Legal Aid office as making sure Mitchell is well taken care of is a priority.



Kinship Legal Project

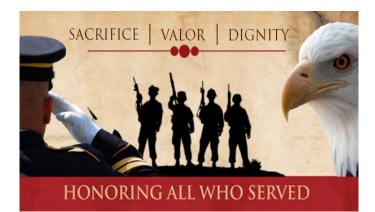
The coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated the opioid crisis. The pandemic isolated people, preventing many from getting help they needed. At an August 24 th news conference, our sheriff, reported that Seminole county was on pace to surpass the 80 deaths recorded in 2020 from overdoses. A total of 73 deaths had been reported in 2021 as the time of the new conference.

Many children and youth are affected by the familial opioid use which have lead to maltreatment or neglect and in other cases have left the children orphans.

Our legal project assist family members in obtaining temporary custody orders of minor children adversely affected by the opioid pandemic. Last year, we assisted 32 families with this legal issue.

An example of one of the cases in this project includes Diane. She sought legal assistance in obtaining custody of her sister's 4 minor children. The children's parents had died from opioid overdoses. The sister and the children had been living in an unsafe neighborhood where the children would find bullet casing in their yard and were not allowed to play outside due to the shootings in the area. Our staff attorney assisted and Diane was awarded custody of the children and she secured a section 8 housing voucher to relocate to a safer location.

Veteran's Legal Project



We help low income or vulnerable veterans in with their legal issues such as family, housing or consumer issues. Last year, we helped 57 veteran with free legal assistance.

An example of such assistance includes the following consumer case:

Our staff attorney went to bat for a US World War II army veteran, who was having a billing dispute with his dental office. Despite his repeated requests for an accounting of insurance payments and to speak with someone about getting a credit on his statement which he believed he was due, the dental office refused to speak with him. After talking with the veteran and vigorously advocating on his behalf, the dental office settled the dispute by sending him a check in the amount of \$1,000.



Pro Bono Legal Programs

We are fortunate to have outstanding pro bono attorneys supporting our mission and providing their time, talents and financial support to help in the delivery of the legal services to the less fortunate in our community.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic that have caused difficulties for all in our country, our legal community donated free legal services valued at \$220,535 and contributed \$34,075 in lieu of services donations to help the underprivileged with their serious and difficult legal problems.

EMERITUS ATTORNEY

The Florida Supreme Court has amended two rules to encourage retired attorneys to provide pro bono services. The rule amendment took effect in 2018 and has expanded the pool of individuals eligible to serve as pro bono emeritus attorney for legal aid organizations.

This year, we had the privilege of having our first emeritus attorney join our staff. Retired Attorney John King, a former judge and U.S. Navy Veteran, is rendering free legal assistance to tenants, who are facing maintenance issues or displacement of their homes. Emeritus Lawyer, John King, donates about 20 hours every week to assists impoverished members of the community with their housing matters.

SEALING AND EXPUNGEMENT LEGAL VIRTUAL WORKSHOP

For many years, we held in person legal education classes concerning sealing and expungement of a crime for residents of Seminole County, who were experiencing unemployment or credit issues. Many of our prominent attorneys participated and taught the classes at the Goodwill offices in Sanford.

Unfortunately the pandemic ended our ability to conduct in person classes. But in 2021, pro bono attorney Craig Bissell contacted us with his desire to render pro bono services in the area of Sealing and Expungement. Together with our pro bono coordinator, Maria, and staff from Goodwill industries, Attorney Bissell developed a monthly zoom sealing and expungement classes. Each participant in the class obtains legal information and forms to assist them successfully obtain the sealing or expungement of an eligible crime.

Participants of the class obtain individual assistance in a breakout room on zoom as well as receiving the personal contact information for Craig so that attendees can received assistance whenever they require it. The classes have been very well received by the community as we have seen over 150 individuals sign up for the virtual workshop. The workshop is free to the public.



PRO BONO PROJECT

2021 PRO BONO PANEL and IN LIEU OF SERVICE DONORS

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PRO BONO PROJECT

2021 PRO BONO PANEL and IN LIEU OF SERVICE DONORS

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VOLUNTEERS AND INTERNS

Susana McIntosh



University of Florida

Daniella Subieta



Community Volunteer

Monica Puentes



University of Central Florida

Julian Suero



Barry Law School

Amanda Runion



University of Florida

PRESIDENT AWARD



Nancy Sue Freeman, Esq.

NANCY S. FREEMAN has practiced law in Central Florida since 1993 and currently practices through her own firm, Nancy S. Freeman, P.A., located in Oviedo. Her practice focuses mainly on estate planning, estate and trust administration, probate, and tax matters. The Florida Bar has certified Nancy as a specialist in two practice areas: Wills, Trusts & Estates Law and Tax Law. She is a past Chair and member of the Florida Bar Wills, Trusts & Estates Certification Committee and a past member of the Editorial Board of the Florida Bar News & Journal, the Probate Rules Committee of the Florida Bar, and the Probate Law Committee of the Florida Bar RPPTL Section. She has authored numerous continuing legal education articles and seminars on topics related to estate planning, probate, trust drafting and administration, homestead, and health care advance directives. She is grateful to be able to work with the Seminole County Bar Association Legal Aid Society and inspired to witness the dedication of Legal Aid staff and how their hard work positively impacts our community and improves the lives of so many Seminole County residents.

PRO BONO SERVICE AWARD



John Howard King, Esq.

After college graduation in 1961, John entered the U.S. Navy as the minesweeping officer aboard the U.S.S. Ability. It patrolled out of Guantanamo, Cuba during the 1963 Cuban missile crisis. Later, it cruised the Mediterranean for almost a year. Upon his return to Charleston, NC, he met and married his wife, Linda Kelly, in 1964. They have two children and two grandchildren. John graduated from the University of Florida Fredric G. Levin College of Law in 1967 and immediately after graduation was employed as an Assistant State Attorney in Palm Beach and then in Orange County. In 1972 he was elected to be an Orange County Judge at which he served for eight years. He pursued a general civil practice after that, at which he donated a significant amount of his time performing Pro Bono work. Following his time at his private practice, he joined the Orange County Public Defenders' Office in 1993 from which he retired in 2003. Linda and John moved to Seminole County in 2004 and in 2005 John gualified for Court appointment as a Contract Attorney for dependent children in Seminole County - he held this position for 5 years. This same year, 2005, he became a member of the Winter Park Rotary Club due to his profound belief is humanitarian service. He was a member for 15 years. In 2021, John was certified as an Emeritus Lawyer by the Florida Supreme Court and has ever since donated his time and wealth of expertise to assist the less fortunate in Seminole County. It is because of his continued assistance to the vulnerable members of the community an Emeritus Lawyer that John is being honored with the Pro Bono Service Award.



PRO BONO SERVICE AWARD



Lisa Camille McCrystal, Esq.

Lisa is a partner at Wharton Law Group, P.A., along with my mom, Margaret (the "Wharton" of Wharton Law Group) and her sister, Sylvia "Ann" (Wilson). She is not only grateful that she gets to work alongside her mom and sister every day, but even more so because, in her humble opinion, they also happen to be two of the greatest legal minds she has ever met. Her practice is centered in Elder Law, specifically fiduciary litigation. She loves what she does because it affords her the opportunity to help protect our senior citizens, who are all too often taken advantage of and overlooked, and she is afforded the opportunity to help right the wrongs perpetrated against them. This passion for helping the aging population is what led Lisa to assist an elderly man with a complex probate case completely pro bono; this is the reason why she is being honored with this award. She also enjoys the planning part of her practice. By assisting with and helping craft estate plans, She quells a lot of misplaced fears many people have regarding the probate process in Florida while also providing peace of mind to her clients in knowing their affairs are in order and no burden will be placed on their loved ones after they pass. When you are lucky enough to have mentors like she did, it becomes second nature to recognize that your job as a private practice attorney inherently includes helping when you can, where you can, as much as you can, which is why she is grateful for the opportunity to continue and do so.



Taj Paris Murphy Sr., Esq.

Taj P. Murphy, Sr., Esq. is a devoted husband to his beautiful wife and the father to four wonderful children and two grandchildren. Mr. Murphy is a Maryland native, born in Baltimore and raised in Howard County. He attended Lafayette College on a football scholarship and earned a degree in Government and Law. Mr. Murphy earned his law degree from the University of Baltimore School of Law with a concentration in Litigation. He is admitted to practice law in Florida, Maryland, the District of Columbia, New Jersey and the Federal Courts in each of those jurisdiction. His private firm is focused on criminal matters, family matters, and representation of and human resource training for business entities. Through these experiences he has honed his skills and has confidently engaged in criminal defense, family matters, guardianship matters, personal injury litigation, workers compensation matters, debt relief and collections, construction defect litigation and civil rights litigation. Mr. Murphy is determined to continue to impact the community through the most valuable resource available, time, and thanks the Seminole County Bar Association for the opportunity to impact the community on a local level. He is being honored for his generous donation of his time and talents to assist multiple indigent members of the community. "For all the cruelty and hardship of our world, we are not mere prisoners of fate. Our actions matter, and can bend history in the direction of justice." ~ President Barack H. Obama

PRO BONO SERVICE AWARD



Kevin William Shaughnessy, Esq.

Fortune 50 and other clients turn to Kevin Shaughnessy in a crisis, be it a class action challenging the client's pay practices or an accusation of pattern and practice discrimination, a governmental investigation or lawsuit, or the handling of sensitive whistleblower claims and C-Suite severance agreements. Through advice and counsel, and a unique approach to litigation, Kevin helps clients avoid the potential negative impact of bet-the-company cases and simultaneously assists them in creating and preserving productive working environments. Kevin is Board Certified in Labor and Employment Law by the Florida Bar. He has been ranked by Chambers USA: America's Leading Lawyers for Business from 2004 to 2020, and has been named as one of the top ten employment lawyers in Florida for multiple years. Kevin was the first BakerHostetler employment lawyer named in Chambers Global: Labor and Employment (USA) (2020). He also has been recognized by The Best Lawyers in America® since 2006 and was named by Best Lawyers in America as 2017 Lawyer of the Year Orlando, Litigation -Labor and Employment. "We, as lawyers, are blessed with many gifts and talents, and we should share them with the less fortunate in our community." Kevin is being honored with an award for his pro bono service.



Tyrone Nathaniel Watson, Esq.

Before beginning his legal career, Tyrone N. Watson earned a Bachelor of Science in Microbiology and Cell Science from the University of Florida in 2002. He went on to earn a Master of Science in Criminal Justice from the University of Central Florida. Tyrone N. Watson earned his Juris Doctor at the Barry University Dwayne O. Andreas School of Law. After graduating from law school in 2009 and obtaining his license to practice law in the state of Florida, Tyrone N. Watson spent time practicing privately under the firm name of Tyrone Watson Law, P.A. for four years. In 2014, he accepted a job as an attorney with Voight, P.A., and a firm that specializes in real estate, business law, and bankruptcy and immigration law. Today, Tyrone N. Watson practices privately as Tyrone N. Watson, Esq. In addition to his law -related professional experience, Tyrone N. Watson also spent more than ten years teaching AP Biology and Forensic Science for the Lake County School Board. Tryrone is being honored for his pro bono assistance to numerous underprivileged clients. His favorite inspirational quote: Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. ---President Calvin Coolidge

YOUNG LAWYER PRO BONO SERVICE AWARD



Rachel Ann Mattie, Esq.

Rachel Mattie joined The Umansky Law Firm in 2017. Before joining private practice, she served the Orlando community as an Assistant Public Defender for the Ninth Judicial Circuit. Rachel was the first person in her family to graduate high school and often used her own journey to relate to indigent clients. This empathy followed her into private practice where she attempts to highlight the impact mental health, substance abuse, and financial desperation have on the criminal justice system.

Rachel is being honored for her pro bono assistance in a difficult case requiring substantial time and dedication.

"The highest form of knowledge is empathy, for it requires us to suspend our egos and live in another's world."

LAW STUDENT OF THE YEAR AWARD



Julian Suero

Julian Suero is a native of Central Florida. He did his undergraduate studies at Auburn University in Auburn, Alabama and graduated in 2018 with a Bachelor of Science. As a current 2L student at Barry University, Dwayne O. Andreas School of Law. Julian served as a full-time summer legal intern at Seminole County Legal Aid.

Julian assisted with housing matters involving the potential displacement of the resident and their children from their homes during the peak of the pandemic housing crisis.

PRO BONO COORDINATOR AWARD Maria Andreina Machado Rosa



Maria Andreina Machado Rosa earned her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of Central Florida in 2020. She went on to join the Seminole County Bar Association Legal Aid Society, Inc. as the Pro Bono Coordinator right after graduation and has ever since devoted her time to serving the community. She is an active member of the Florida Pro Bono Coordinators Association Membership Committee as well as a member of the Child Abuse Prevention Task Force. She is fluent in Spanish. Her hardworking nature and commitment to improving our Pro Bono programs is the reason she is receiving this award. One of her favorite quotes is "Fight for the things that you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you." – Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Presenting Sponsor



The mission of the Harper Family Charitable Foundation, Inc. is for the health, education, maintenance and well being of disabled children /adults of all ages only in the Central Florida area, wherever the need is found to be the greatest.

The Harper Family Charitable Foundation, Inc. is funded +/- 99% by the Harper Family.



Presenting Sponsor



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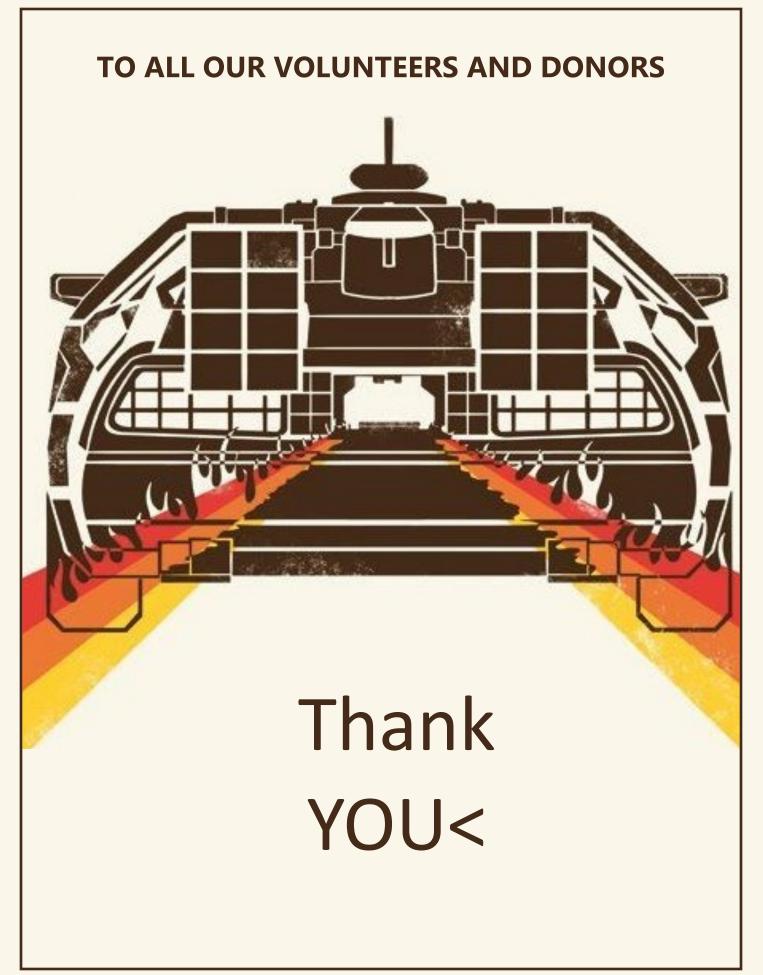
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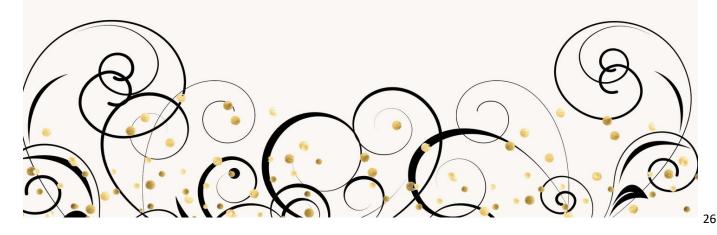


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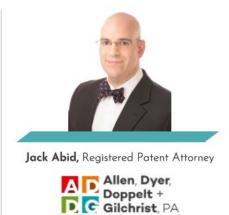
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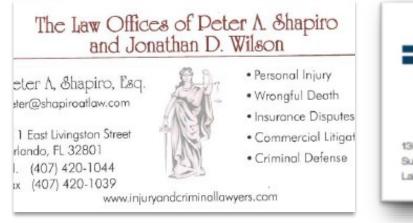
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