



SEMINOLE COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION
LEGAL AID SOCIETY

101 W Palmetto Ave, Longwood, FL 32750
407-834-1660



2022 –2023

Annual Report

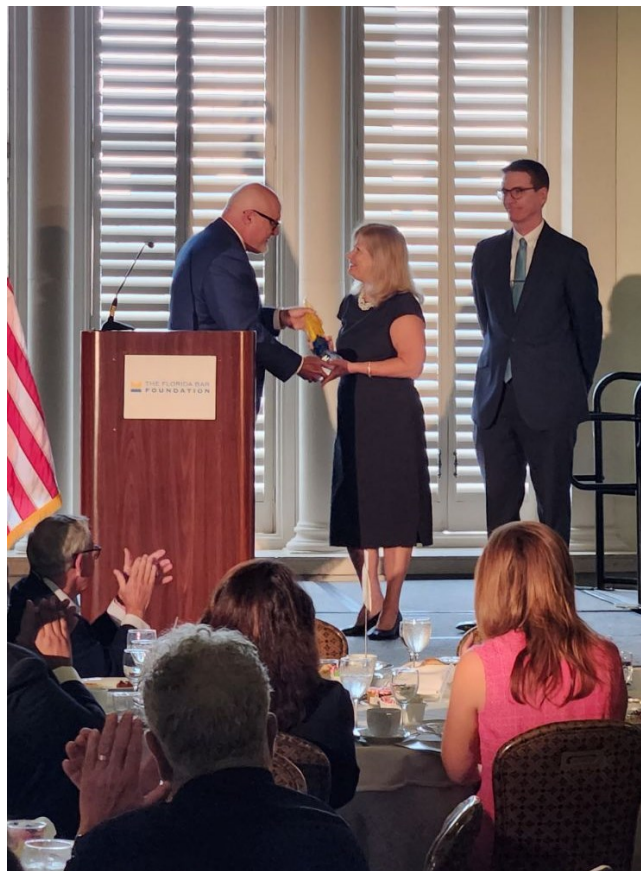
SERVING THE COMMUNITY AND ENHANCING ACCESS TO
CIVIL JUSTICE IN SEMINOLE COUNTY SINCE 1975



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MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SILVIA MCLAIN



*Attorney Silvia McLain and Attorney Matthew Gripp
accepting the Paul Doyle Children's Advocacy Award*

Our acclaimed legal aid program, despite its modest scale, has garnered prestigious awards for its exceptional commitment to providing accessible legal assistance. Recognized for its impactful contributions, this program has effectively navigated legal challenges, making a significant difference in the lives of those it serves.

Awards we have received in recent years are as follows:

2023— Paul Doyle Children's Advocacy Award; Presented by the Florida Bar Foundation for our work with foster youth

2021— St. Martin de Porres Award; Highest Award presented for Social Justice by Catholic Lawyers Guild of Central Florida

2018— L Michael Roffino Pro Bono Award; Presented by the General Practice Solo and Small Firm section of the Florida Bar for our award winning pro bono project

2016— L Michael Roffino Pro Bono Award; Presented by the General Practice Solo and Small Firm section of the Florida Bar for our award winning pro bono project

We extend our sincere appreciation to all the pro bono attorneys, board members, volunteer students, valued donors and supporters for your exceptional contributions, your time and dedication to values that define our legal aid program.


*Together
We Can!*

Silvia McLain



TABLE OF CONTENTS

MISSION	1
ACCOMPLISHMENTS	2
PRO BONO PROGRAM	3
VOLUNTEERS AND INTERNS	8
2023 AWARD RECIPIENTS	9
BOARD OF DIRECTORS	15
LEGAL AID STAFF	16
SPONSORS	18
DONORS	26



Mission

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

We offer no-cost civil legal services and educational support of exceptional quality to underprivileged and low-income individuals residing in Seminole County. Our mission is to safeguard their personal well-being, enhance self-sufficiency, and elevate their overall quality of life. For numerous individuals, we serve as their sole gateway to the judicial system, addressing crucial legal issues. 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

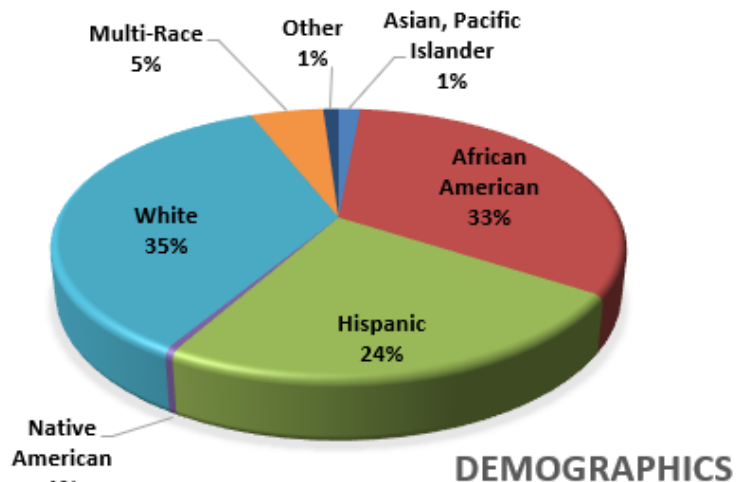
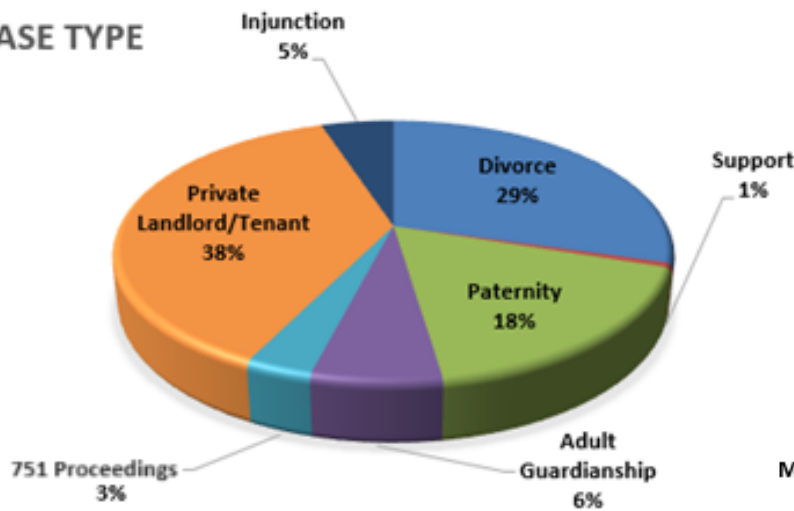
The Seminole County Legal Aid Society offered vital assistance across a spectrum of issues, including family law, housing, and guardianships. In addition to our on-site endeavors, our outreach clinics connected with individuals who might otherwise have faced barriers to seeking help, providing them with guidance to help rebuild their lives and thrive. We organized a legal advice clinic for veterans at the public library in Casselberry. In Sanford, we conducted sealing and expungement workshops at the public library. Additionally, we hosted a legal advice clinic for college students at Seminole State. Our participation extended to various community events.



This past fiscal year, our volunteers and staff attorneys served **971 families**, including **1252 children**, with their legal needs. We obtained court orders establishing child support in the amount of **\$544,431.54** to sustain vulnerable families. Volunteer attorneys donated pro bono legal services valued at **\$218,600** and made monetary contributions of **\$26,135**.

Charts below show type of cases handled and demographics of our clients.

CASE TYPE





Attainable Housing Project

The attainable housing crisis in Seminole County, Florida, is a severe and urgent situation marked by a high number of individuals and families facing the threat of losing their homes due to eviction or residing in poorly maintained housing. This crisis often stems from a combination of economic challenges, job insecurity, and housing affordability issues. The looming threat of eviction not only jeopardizes the stability and well-being of affected households but also contributes to broader societal issues, including homelessness and increased strain on social services. Tenants who have eviction records often face additional challenges, and living in deplorable housing conditions exacerbates their difficulties. This situation creates a cycle of housing instability and substandard living conditions.

We 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 delivery of these legal services assists clients in making crucial decisions regarding their housing, ensuring stability for their families.

We assisted **342** residents of Seminole county with critical housing related legal issues.

Client Story



A bus driver employed by Seminole County Public Schools reached out to our office seeking assistance with an eviction. By the time a staff attorney engaged with her, the court had already issued a 24 hour to vacate order despite her consistent rent payments and reliable tenancy. Unfamiliar with the eviction court process, she found herself at the stage where the judge had ordered the eviction. The staff attorney, after compiling payment receipts from the bus driver, intervened by requesting the court to rescind the eviction order, highlighting that the rent had been consistently paid. The judge concurred, resulting in the halting of the eviction process. The bus driver, on the verge of wrongful eviction, successfully resolved the dispute with her landlord and regained the right to continue residing in her home. Thanks to the assistance provided by Seminole County Legal Aid, she can now maintain peace of mind while continuing to serve the children and families of Seminole County.

VOCA LEGAL PROJECT

Experiencing domestic violence is one of the most harrowing ordeals a person can endure. Statistics suggest that approximately 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men will confront some form of domestic violence in their lifetime. These actions create an environment that can seem nearly impossible to break free from, leaving not only physical wounds but also enduring emotional scars. The individuals, both women and men, who summon the courage to seek help amidst such adversity, inspire us, and we take immense pride in offering them the assistance they need to break free. In the past year, 45% of our cases involved various forms of violence inflicted upon our clients. We are pleased to extend free legal support, helping them secure injunctions for protection, dissolve marriages, establish child support, arrange time-sharing, and address other family law concerns. Our aspiration is that this support will empower these survivors to escape their distressing situations, rebuild their lives, and safeguard their families.

Last year, we obtained court order awards of approximately **\$544,431.54** in child support and alimony to enhance the self sufficiency of our clients and their children.

Client Story

Mia came to our office concerned and frightened. She had just cooperated with the Seminole County Sheriff to obtain a Risk Protection Order against her Husband. The Risk Protection Order was entered, and Mia's husband was ordered by the court to relinquish all his weapons. He recently was physically abusive to her, and he also was unpredictable and suicidal. Mia's husband had a violent criminal history, and she desperately wanted a divorce and protection for her 2 young children.

She consulted with the Staff Attorney who agreed to represent her in her divorce. The appropriate documents were filed, and for the client to obtain child support, the staff attorney also issued a subpoena to the husband's last known place of employment to learn his income and ability to pay child support. The case proceeded to a final hearing with the judge. Mia wanted supervised timesharing with the children and her husband because of his violent tendencies and unpredictable behavior and instability. The staff attorney was successful in obtaining that for Mia, as well as substantial child support.

Mia was extremely grateful for Legal Aid's assistance in her case, she said she could not have achieved these goals if not for our help. She said she was now able to move on to a better life for her and her children.



Disabled Child Legal Assistance Project

As a parent safeguarding the well-being of your disabled child is your primary concern. However, when a developmentally disabled child reaches the age of 18, parental legal authority over decision-making ends. Guardian advocacy presents a solution for family members seeking to secure the legal authority necessary to make crucial choices concerning their adult child's welfare, involving medical, educational, and social matters. This is where we step in, dedicated to assisting parents in establishing Adult Guardian Advocacy to protect their children's best interests.

In the past fiscal year, we provided support to **68 families** as they navigated the often-complex path of Guardian Advocacy, ensuring that those in need receive the assistance they require. Additionally, we aided **42 families** in developing Annual Guardianship Plans, enabling them to continue safeguarding their children to the best of their abilities.



Client Story



One such family we had the privilege of assisting was Nicholas and Lori. They reached out to our office because their son, Nathan, who has Down syndrome, had recently turned 18. Their primary goal was to secure guardian advocacy, allowing them to continue providing care and making crucial decisions for their child. Nathan's significant reliance on his parents was evident.

Upon meeting with the attorney, Nicholas and Lori shared their insights into their son, describing him as a cheerful, game-loving, puzzle-solving, and music-enthusiastic individual.

The attorney promptly prepared the required documentation and submitted it to the court. In just over a month, Nathan's parents were appointed as guardians. Now, Nicholas and Lori can find comfort in their newfound ability to make essential decisions concerning their son's well-being.

Veteran's Legal Project

Veterans have made significant sacrifices for their nation, and it's important to provide them with the assistance and support they need. In the last year, we helped **77** veterans with issues related to family and housing.



Client Story

Tony is a Veteran and a very involved father who, although he was not married to the mother of his child he wanted to be in his daughter's life in every way. The Mother of his child had been violent to him in the past, and she had been arrested for domestic violence when the child was very young. He tried but could not work any timesharing out with the mother of his child and she continuously withheld the child from him if she would get angry or upset with Tony. He came to our office seeking help with getting some court ordered timesharing with his daughter, and a parenting plan that the mother would have to follow. He had found out the mother of his child and taken the child and moved to another county, Kissimmee, Florida, without him knowing it. He was very distraught and upset and worried that he would never see his daughter again.

He consulted with the staff attorney who agreed to take his paternity case to make sure he would be able to see his daughter and be involved in her life. The staff attorney filed the necessary documents to proceed in the case,

Tony was very grateful that the staff attorney was there with him every step of the way. A successful mediation and a parenting plan were worked out which gave Tony liberal timesharing with their daughter. He was so happy that now there was a court order that defined when he would have his child, and ensured he would always be in her life.

Kinship Legal Project

Some of the most vulnerable members of our community are its children. When a child is abused or neglected, we endeavor to help those in their families who wish to protect them by assisting them in gaining custody. We helped **23** such families in the last year.



Client Story

Courtney contacted our office to apply for services because she wanted to obtain temporary custody of her younger sister. Her younger sister Brittney has an auto immune disease and other medical issues that went untreated while living with the father. The mother has not been involved in her sister's life as she was addicted to drugs and homeless. The father also had mental health and a drug addiction problem. Courtney felt Brittany was not safe at their father's home and wanted her sister to move in with her after a domestic violence incident involving the father and her sister. The police were called and when they came to question him, the father committed suicide. Our staff attorney met with the client and immediately filed documents with the court so that Courtney could obtain temporary custody of her sister. The Judge signed the Order for Temporary Custody 4 days later giving temporary custody of Brittany to her sister Courtney. Now Courtney can do everything necessary to care for her sister and provide a stable environment so her sister can flourish. Courtney was very thankful for the excellent services that our office provided.

Pro Bono Legal Services

Seminole State College Legal Clinic



The college experience can be a period of uncertainty for many individuals. For the first time, they find themselves away from their usual support systems, making them vulnerable and uncertain about where to seek help, especially in legal matters.

Our Legal Clinic, held every 2nd and 4th Thursday of the month, now offers students a valuable resource. They can connect with a staff attorney to discuss any legal issues they may encounter. This initiative extends a helping hand to these young adults, empowering them to continue thriving and reaching their full potential.

These students represent the future, and our commitment is to ensure that their future remains bright and full of opportunities.

Sealing and Expungement Clinic

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.



Happily, we were able to return to in person classes at the Seminole County Library in Sanford. In collaboration with our pro bono coordinator, Camryn, and the staff from Goodwill Industries, Attorney Chmelir and Attorney Greene actively assisted our community, providing essential guidance both through virtual Zoom sessions and in-person consultations. This support enabled individuals to take meaningful steps towards advancing their lives. Each participant in the class obtains legal information and forms to assist them successfully obtain the sealing or expungement of an eligible crime. The classes continue to be very well received by the community, with **68** individuals who have signed attended the class.

VOLUNTEERS AND INTERNS

Adesole Orogade



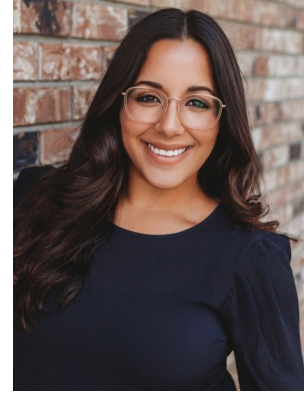
University of
Central Florida

Alison Pearson



University of
Central Florida

Betsy Castro



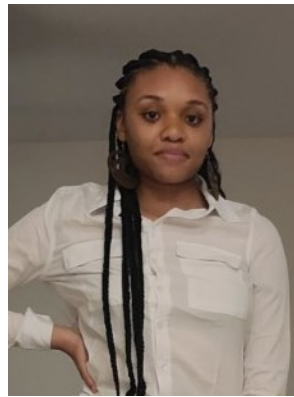
Seattle University
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Brendan Fink



University of
Central Florida

Glory Emmanuel



Barry Law School

Petrus Martens



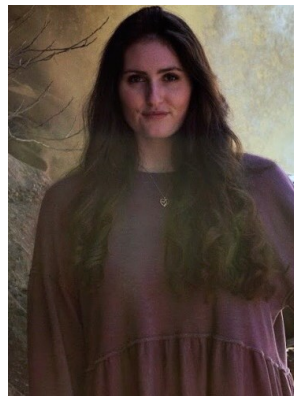
Barry Law School

Zachary Begey



University of
Central Florida

Gabriel Grillon



Barry Law School

Raoh Connell



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PRESIDENT AWARD



Deborah Warner

DEBORAH WARNER is a managing partner of Warner & Warner. She handles complex personal injury, auto accidents, wrongful death, medical malpractice, and nursing home negligence/neglect cases. Most often clients come to Debbie at a time when they have been seriously injured and are suffering, confused, and vulnerable. Debbie is a top rated and experienced trial lawyer, and she is committed to providing ethical and aggressive legal representation, while treating her clients with the compassion and respect they need and deserve.

After graduating with honors from Florida State College of Law, Debbie joined a large, reputable Orlando insurance defense firm and spent years defending insurance companies, including a major automobile insurance carrier, corporations, nursing homes, and doctors in various lawsuits. After years of defending wrongdoers, Debbie realized her true passion was fighting for families victimized by negligence and medical malpractice—those who desperately need a committed, passionate, and aggressive attorney to pursue their cause. Debbie has committed her life to pursuit of justice and has obtained many verdicts and settlements in excess of a million dollars.

Debbie has served as the president of the board of directors for the Seminole County Legal Aid program for the last two years. She is an exceptional leader and exemplary advocate for our organization. Under her leadership, we have achieved significant milestones and made a positive impact on the lives of those we serve.

PRO BONO ATTORNEY OF THE YEAR

Eric Boughman



“Be the reason someone smiles today” Credit to my wife, Heather

“Integrity is defined by what you do when no one is looking.”

Eric Boughman is an AV-Rated Attorney and Certified Mediator, and Co-Founder of ForsterBoughman, a business boutique law firm. He enjoys resolving sometimes complex legal issues and disputes for a wide range of businesses, business owners, investors, and entrepreneurs in industries ranging from healthcare, technology, real estate, and others. He began his legal career in Las Vegas, NV (where he is still licensed) but has practiced most of his career in Central Florida.

Eric is a dedicated husband, father, animal lover, and community servant. He is a long-time volunteer consultant for Franklins Friends, a local animal welfare organization, past President of the Rotary Club of Lake Mary, current District General Counsel for the Central Florida Rotary District, and frequent volunteer at his kids’ school. Eric is a US Air Force Veteran and has enjoyed the opportunity to help other vets through the SCBA Legal Aid program. In spare time, he enjoys staying physically and mentally active.

LAW FIRM OF THE YEAR AWARD

Erin Greene



Erin was born and raised in Seminole County, Florida. After graduating from Lake Mary High School in 1990, she began her college education at the University of Florida and graduated in 1994 with a Bachelor of Arts in Criminology/Criminal Justice with honors. In 1995, she attended law school at the University of Florida and graduated in 1997 with honors.

Throughout her career in private practice, She specializes in the areas of bankruptcy, probate, family law, and estate planning. She is also a Certified Mediator in both Dependency and Circuit Court. Erin presents monthly sealing and expungement workshops at the Sharing Center in Longwood, as well as, presents numerous legal educational presentations through out the community such as Preparation of Wills at the Sanford Community Center. She also serves as a board member of the Seminole Legal Aid program.

PRO BONO SERVICE AWARD

Sherry Lambson-Eisele



Sherry Lambson-Eisele was admitted to the Florida Bar in 1994 and graduated from the University of Miami School of Law. Sherry Lambson-Eisele chairs the firm’s Business Litigation Practice Group and the Bankruptcy and Creditor’s Rights Practice Group. She has almost 30 years of experience handling construction, complex business, creditors’ rights, lender representation, bankruptcy, property, and insurance defense litigation matters. Ms. Eisele has litigated matters ranging from multi-million-dollar claims to single-family home-owner matters. Her extensive litigation experience includes litigating in state, federal, bankruptcy, and appellate courts as well as arbitration and other dispute resolution proceedings. Ms. Eisele has also testified as an expert regarding attorneys’ fees in business and construction litigation matters in Florida. In the area of real estate, she handles matters involving contracts, title claims, quiet title actions, boundary disputes, easements, trespass, and other real estate matters. She is a board member and secretary for the Seminole County Florida Association of Women Lawyers. She volunteers monthly at the Veterans legal advice clinic at the Casselberry Library.

PRO BONO SERVICE AWARD

Tobe Lev



Tobe Lev was admitted to the Florida Bar in 1977 and graduated from Temple University—James E. Beasley School of Law. He is Board certified in Labor and Employment law. From 1976 until 1981, he worked as an attorney for two federally funded legal services programs – Central Florida Legal Services and Broward County Legal Aid. In 1981, he joined the law firm of Egan, Lev & Siwica, in Orlando, Florida, where he still works part time doing Labor and Employment Law, mostly on behalf of public sector labor unions. He generously donates his time to Seminole County residents by assisting with our housing legal project. The housing project holds significant importance to Attorney Lev as it ensures that individuals have access to legal representation and empowers individuals with the knowledge and tools to navigate complex legal processes. This housing project helps prevent homelessness resulting from eviction or unsafe living conditions. It protects vulnerable populations, ensures community well-being and contributes to reducing disparities in legal representation.

JUDICIAL ASSISTANT OF THE YEAR AWARD

Debbie Whitehead



Debbie Whitehead is a proud native of Seminole County, having been born and raised in Sanford. After graduating from Seminole High School and Seminole State College, Debbie began working in the Seminole County Clerk’s Office, where she stayed for four years. She then spent the next 29 years as a Judicial Assistant for Judge Alan Dickey, ending with his retirement in 2014. During her time with Judge Dickey she was honored by the Seminole County Chamber of Commerce as Secretary of the Year. After Judge Dickey’s retirement, Debbie served as Judicial Assistant for Judge Melanie Chase, after which Debbie retired with 35 years of service to Seminole County. She came out of retirement to work part-time for Attorney Mark O’Mara and was later persuaded to come back here full-time to serve as Judicial Assistant—first to Judge Kenneth Lester and then to Judge Marlene Alva—staying with each until their respective retirements. Today, Debbie enjoys serving as Judge William Orth’s Judicial Assistant. She has learned so much from the esteemed judges and attorneys she has had the honor of working with over the years. Not only was Debbie born and raised in Seminole County; she also settled and built a life here with her husband Nicky, to whom she has been married for 34 years. Debbie and Nicky are so proud of their two children: Aaron, age 33 and Molly, age 24. Her favorite quote is of course by Jimmy Buffett: “Move in, Move out, Move on” and “Bubbles Up, they will always point you towards home”. She is truly grateful for the kindness she has been shown in her years of serving the 18th Circuit. Debbie assist our volunteer college and law students observe court proceedings.

LAW STUDENT OF THE YEAR AWARD

Betsy Castro



Betsy graduated from the University of Central Florida with a B.S. in Psychology. After graduation, she commissioned into the U.S. Air Force as a nuclear launch control officer. She spent the next four years as a Missileer stationed at Vandenberg Space Force Base in California, and Malmstrom Air Force Base in Montana. After separating from service, and prior to law school, she worked for the Army Corps of Engineers as a realty specialist.

Betsy is now a 3L at Seattle University School of Law, and is happy to complete her final year of law school in her home state of Florida. Her past internship experience includes working for in-house counsel at the Allen Institute, a nonprofit bioscience research institute; providing legal aid to moderate income individuals with the Moderate Means program; and working as a Summer Law Intern with both the Department of Justice’s Commercial Litigation and Criminal Antitrust divisions.

Betsy is excited to join the Seminole County Bar Association Legal Aid Society and immerse herself in community aid and outreach. You can find her visiting her family in South Florida or drinking a cafecito with her fiancé and her Great Dane, Bodhi!

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.

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Intake



Congratulations to **Attorney Sue Selsky** on 20 years of dedicated service at Legal Aid! Your commitment to providing legal assistance and support to those in need is truly commendable. Your two decades of hard work, compassion, and expertise have undoubtedly made a significant impact on the lives of many.

To All Our Volunteers and Donors

Thank
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We applaud its mission to help the most vulnerable citizens of Seminole County access legal information, gain free legal assistance and representation, and understand their rights.

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"Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision... It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results."

Thank You!

With great appreciation to the gifted staff, generous pro-bono attorneys and big-hearted volunteers of the Seminole County Bar Association Legal Aid Society.

Nancy S. Freeman, P.A.

Nancy Freeman

Marla Schaffer



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