

**For Immediate Release**  
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**PENNSYLVANIA LEGAL AID NETWORK HOLDS STATEWIDE EXCELLENCE  
AWARDS EVENT AT HARRISBURG HILTON**

HARRISBURG, PA – The Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network (PLAN) honored twenty-two recipients of the PLAN Excellence Awards at its annual awards banquet on Tuesday evening, March 15, 2016 at the Harrisburg Hilton. PLAN Excellence Award honorees includes legal aid advocates, private attorneys, lay advocates, community organizations and government groups who demonstrated excellence in their daily work providing access to justice to people regardless of their ability to pay.

The work of the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network (PLAN) is a vital component of Pennsylvania's social services safety net by providing civil legal counsel and representation to resolve critical problems involving such basic needs as shelter, healthcare, income and personal safety," said Samuel W. Milkes, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, Inc. "The annual awards banquet provides the opportunity to applaud legal aid advocates, who everyday give those who have nowhere else to turn, equal access to justice."

The Excellence Awards recognize legal aid attorneys, paralegals, support staff and friends of civil legal aid who support the clients served by the civil legal programs that comprise the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network. PLAN solicited nominations from across the Commonwealth and based its selection on a variety of criteria that demonstrated excellence and diligence in improving the availability and quality of civil legal services for low income people and victims of domestic violence in Pennsylvania.

"The mission of the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network is to ensure equal access to justice so that Pennsylvanians can have representation, when facing important civil legal concerns, affecting their safety, health, shelter and survival," offered Christine Kirby, Director of Development for the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network. "Our Excellence Award recipients epitomize the tireless efforts of legal aid advocates and friends in the private bar who work to deliver on the promise of justice."

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The 2016 Excellence Award Honorees are:

- **Joseph R. DeCristopher, Esq.**, a Staff Attorney with North Penn Legal Services in Sunbury, PA.

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- **FedEx Ground Corporate Legal Department** in Moon Township, PA for creating and sustaining a robust pro bono program helping the elderly, children and victims of domestic violence.
- **William E. Gibbons, Esq.**, a Senior Attorney in the Family Advocacy Unit in Community Legal Services in Philadelphia, PA.
- **The Hardwood Estates Project Team**, a group of individuals and groups who came together to fight injustice and save a 91 lot mobile home community in Conneaut Lake, PA. Hardwood Estates Project Team members include:
  - **Wendy Carter**. Director of Housing Administration. PathStone Corporation in Harrisburg, PA.
  - **Nancy Close**. President, Hardwood Estates Resident Association, Conneaut Lake, PA.
  - **Robert Damewood, Esq.**, Staff Attorney, Regional Housing Legal Services in Pittsburgh, PA.
  - **Carla Falkenstein**, Director of Western Region with Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency, Pittsburgh, PA.
  - **Kenneth Joseph, Esq.**, a volunteer attorney from Pepper Hamilton LLP in Pittsburgh, PA.
  - **The PA Department of Environmental Protection Safe Drinking Water Program**
  - **Mel Reinhart**, Vice President, Hardwood Estates Resident Association in Conneaut Lake, PA
  - **Charles (Chuck) G. Scalise**, President & CEO of Housing and Neighborhood Development Services of Erie; and
  - **Wesley S. Speary, Esq.** • Former Martin Luther King Jr. Intern who worked for Regional Housing Legal Services in Pittsburgh.
- **Rochelle L. Jackson**, Public Policy Advocate with Just Harvest in Pittsburgh, PA and Board Member of Board Member of Neighborhood Legal Services Association, who brings the voice and experiences of low-income people to key forums.
- **Mark A. Krochka, Esq.**, Staff Attorney, Neighborhood Legal Services Association, in New Castle, PA.
  - **Matthew D. Lee, Esq.**, Partner, Blank Rome and Pro Bono Volunteer with Philadelphia VIP in Philadelphia, PA; and
  - **Jeffrey A. Mills, Esq.**, a Partner with the law firm of Nikolaus & Hohenadel, LLP in Lancaster, PA and the Chair of the Lancaster Bar Association Foundation's Safe at Home Campaign.

The Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network will also recognize the efforts of six law firms whose class action advocacy resulted in *cy pres* distributions to the PA IOLTA Board and PLAN legal aid programs:

- **Barrack, Rodos & Bacine**, Philadelphia PA
- **Donovan Axler, LLC**, Philadelphia, PA
- **Feldman, Shepherd, Wohlgeleirnter, Tanner, Weinstock, Dodig, LLP**, Philadelphia, PA
- **Francis & Mailman, PC**, Berwyn, PA
- **Kessler, Topaz, Meltzer & Check, LLP**, Radnor, PA; and
- **Wohl & Fruchter, LLP**, New York, NY

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In 2012, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court implemented new civil procedure rules directing how residual funds from class action lawsuits are to be distributed. The rules require 50% of residual funds to be designated to the Pennsylvania Interest on Lawyers Trust Account (the PA IOLTA) Board for the provision of civil legal aid. The remaining 50 percent may be designated to the PA IOLTA Board or other organizations, like legal aid programs, that have a relationship to, or promote the interests of the class action lawsuit's objectives.

These *cy pres* distributions translate to direct services and the pursuit of justice for victims of domestic violence and low income clients. They also provide a practical method for dealing with unclaimed settlement funds and the intention of the class to provide access to justice.

Pennsylvania Supreme Court Chief Justice Thomas G. Saylor stated, "I'm pleased that the Supreme Court, through its rulemaking authority, could provide an avenue to promote access to justice while also promoting the interests of the class. I also applaud those lawyers and law firms we now honor, which have taken the lead to fulfill that dual mission."

Pennsylvania IOLTA Board Chair Irwin W. Aronson of Harrisburg presented the initial PLAN Excellence Award to the Mark Rosen of Barrack, Rodos & Bacine, Alan M. Feldman of Feldman, Shepherd, Wohlgelernter, Tanner, Weinstock, Dodig, LLP and Terence Ziegler of Kessler, Topaz, Meltzer & Check, LLP.

Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, Inc. is a client-centered organization that provides leadership, funding, and support to improve the availability and quality of civil legal aid and direct legal services for low income people and victims of domestic violence in Pennsylvania. The Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network of fourteen civil legal aid programs helps those who have nowhere else to turn when facing a critical civil legal problem by providing a full range of civil legal services which can include information, legal advice and/or representation.

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