



BROOKLYN A NEWS

WINTER 2007

PROFILES



SAUL SHAPIRO is a powerhouse litigator with Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler LLP, handling complex commercial cases, First Amendment law or intellectual property issues, while representing clients such as Major League Baseball, major media outfits, and record companies. A graduate of Brown University and Yale Law School, where he was an editor of the *Yale Law Journal*, Saul clerked for Judge Robert L. Carter in the US District Court, Southern District of New York.

Saul proudly counts Judge Carter and the late Judge Harold Tyler as mentors. Saul, as a new member of Brooklyn A's Board, is most gratified to be able to follow in Judge Tyler's footsteps, supporting neighborhood-based legal services in general and Brooklyn A in particular. "I had tremendous respect and admiration for Judge Tyler and am honored to strengthen the deep commitment by Judge Tyler and our firm to Brooklyn A."

Saul, his wife Kerith Arono and their two children, Amelia, 6, and Toby, 4 live in Brooklyn Heights. Kerith is a television

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Staff Spotlight: Victor Torres

Victor Torres is the Director of Brooklyn A's Disability Advocacy Project (DAP). Since 1985 our DAP has continuously served low-income Brooklynites. The DAP staff counsels clients and represents them at disability benefit hearings when Social Security determines them medically ineligible for SSI or when Social Security terminates their benefits. DAP units were created in 1985, when New York City allocated funding to Legal Services of New York and the Legal Aid Society to represent clients improperly denied SSI benefits. Funding was the result of a 1984 pilot project run by MFY Legal Services that demonstrated the need to represent disabled public assistance recipients and the project's efficacy in addressing that need.

Most DAP clients suffer from emotional disorders, usually related to depression and anxiety and often springing from personal and family-related issues, environmental factors and of course their quality of life. Many of Victor's clients live in the most impoverished sections of Brooklyn with inadequate medical care, dreadful living conditions, high crime rates, overcrowded schools, and limited access to healthy and nourishing food. Most DAP clients are ill-educated about the judicial process. In representing Brooklyn A's clients, Victor and his associate, Alma Brown, "make the case" to an administrative law judge (ALJ) using information gathered from the clients and from their treating physicians. Victor and Alma are adept at using the rules which regulate the Social Security Administration and various medically related materials to convince the ALJs to do the right thing.

Victor is the first paralegal to head a Legal Unit among legal services agencies. While it was a major challenge being the paralegal that "raised the bar", Victor showcased the ability of a paralegal to manage a Legal Unit and take on the responsibilities that have traditionally been delegated to attorneys. In recognition of his outstanding work and years of service, the City Bar Association honored Victor with its 2005 Legal Services Award. Victor was the first paralegal in history to receive the award. Victor commented at that time, "I feel as though I was inducted to the Legal Services equivalent of the



PHOTO: HELEN P. TORRES

Marty Needelman and Victor Torres holding Victor's Legal Services Award at a ceremony at the City Bar Association.

Baseball Hall of Fame." It is an honor that was richly deserved.

In 2005, to expand the work of Brooklyn A's DAP, Brooklyn A approached major law firms to request pro bono assistance in advocating for our clients. Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton answered the call and committed to helping us in these critical cases. Cleary associates have attended in-depth trainings led by Victor, and since October 2005, have successfully handled nine cases for our clients. Brooklyn A and Cleary Gottlieb are thrilled with this project, which benefits Cleary's associates, Brooklyn A's DAP, and most of all our clients. While the associates are gaining valuable legal experience, they are also broadening their understanding of the importance of legal services and the influence one can have on the lives of those who need – but are not able to afford – legal representation.

We and our clients are fortunate to have an advocate like Victor Torres at the helm of Brooklyn A's DAP.

Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A provides high-quality neighborhood-based civil legal services to low-income individuals and groups in the communities of Williamsburg, Greenpoint, Bushwick, Oceanhill-Brownsville, East New York, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Cypress Hills, Starrett City, City Line, East Flatbush, Flatlands, and Canarsie.

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Brooklyn A News is a publication of Brooklyn Legal Services Corp. A

The Times They Are A'Changing (We Hope!)

The recent dramatic electoral changes in Washington and Albany give the legal services community reason for optimism that "the dark era" may be over. For many years now, we have lived with indifference and often shortsighted hostility to the work of legal services and legal aid programs, by increasingly reduced real dollar support, and by restrictions that dramatically obstruct our ability to be effective.

At Brooklyn A we are very proud of our achievements during these very difficult times. We have sustained our partnerships with our incredibly effective neighborhood groups and community organizations and we have opened an additional neighborhood office rather than following the trend of shrinkage, consolidation and centralization pursued virtually everywhere else. We have kept our vision clear and our commitment firm. Now its time to breathe deeply, and move ahead with Sargent Shriver's founding vision of community-based justice and empowerment.

The NY State Bar has made the proposed \$50 million allocation for legal services programs and the creation of an office in the Governor's Executive Chamber to sustain and expand that commitment, high on its legislative agenda.

For the first time, the Governor has included a \$10 million allocation for legal services in the Executive budget, rather than leaving us working to

have a significantly smaller amount added in by the Assembly at the end of every budget negotiation.

At the Federal level, the new Congress, in the current budget, retroactively adopted a 6% increase for Legal Services. The American Bar Association also has made a priority in its legislative agenda for the coming year of increasing legal services funding and of eliminating the debilitating restrictions against our representation of undocumented immigrants, our use of class actions, and our seeking attorneys' fees in litigation.

If sufficient additional monies become available, we are chomping at the bit to restore and enlarge our existing eviction prevention, community and economic development, neighborhood group representation, AIDS/HIV, family, domestic violence, predatory lending and government benefits units, as well as to expand into such other critically-needed areas as consumer protection, low-income coop support, workforce re-entry, environmental, and family day care representation.

It is incumbent on all of us who believe in access to justice and supporting the empowering of low-income communities to push for even more support for our critically-needed work. As Sargent Shriver would continue to say, the War Against Poverty continues to be the war we need to fight and win!

—Marty Needelman
Project Director and Chief Counsel

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producer and "very involved" mother of the two young Shapiros. Saul loves the scale of the Heights; "it has a village feel, you know all your neighbors," and knows every square inch, since he grew up in the Heights.

FRED HILL, the son of a social worker and an accountant, both socially conscious and involved in their Pittsburgh community gave Fred a value system founded on hard work and education. In 1968 Fred left college to become a state trooper, after being impressed by the department's professionalism in response to the urban riots. While working as a trooper, Fred earned undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Pittsburgh.

Fred started out as an associate in commercial litigation and labor law at the Rose Schmidt Dixon law firm in Pittsburgh. His career at Fortune 500 companies began in 1980 at Westinghouse. Fred ultimately moved to New



York to serve as Executive VP for J.P. Morgan Chase, running worldwide marketing and communications. Fred has never felt held back because he is African-American, nonetheless, he believes corporate

America can do more to expand opportunities for minorities and women.

Fred and his wife Lynn live in a downtown Manhattan loft. Between them, they have four children and five grandchildren. Fred recently retired from Chase, and he and Lynn are now knee-deep in construction of a dream house and development sites in Virgin Gorda. In spite of his Caribbean commitments, Fred continues to be an active Brooklyn A Board Member.

Profiles are by Jane Barret, a private attorney practicing in Brooklyn, a long-time member of the Brooklyn A Board, and herself a former Brooklyn A alumna.

Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation Builds “Green” Affordable Housing

by Mike Haber

Affordable housing typically means housing subsidized by government or private investment, allowing low- and moderate-income families to rent or purchase. For-profit developers might build affordable units to take advantage of the subsidies, however most affordable housing in New York City is created by Community Development Corporations (CDCs). These non-profit community-based groups work with city, state, and federal agencies to create affordable housing.

CDCs work primarily in communities damaged by years of disinvestment, redlining, and neglect, such as those in North and East Brooklyn. Brooklyn A's client CDCs, represented by our Community & Economic Development Unit (CEDU), have created thousands of units of affordable housing. These efforts have had a dramatic and visible impact, curbing homelessness and growing the self-sufficiency of those communities.

For example, one of the most popular affordable housing programs is the “Neighborhood Homes Program” (NHP). CDCs receive city-owned 1-, 2-, and 3-family homes in significant disrepair to gut rehab and then resell. The subsidies allow the houses to be sold with affordable mortgages. Among other requirements, the purchasers must commit to not resell the properties for a set number of years. A number of our CDC clients have participated in NHP and have transformed dozens of dilapidated buildings into quality affordable housing for moderate-income residents.

BEYOND PURCHASE PRICE AFFORDABILITY

While affordable housing development in North and East Brooklyn has helped to dramatically improve blocks and even whole neighborhoods, it is not a perfect cure-all for the housing problems in the City. One challenge for affordable housing development is that programs like NHP create housing that is affordable in only one way: the purchase price and mortgage



Brooklyn A's CEDU is working with Cypress Hills LDC to develop affordable housing that fights homelessness and makes our communities more self-sufficient while helping to improve the environment and saving homeowners money on their energy bills.

payments are kept low. While that is the central concern for most homebuyers, NHP and like programs do not directly address the ongoing maintenance and energy costs that continue to burden owners of affordable housing. Our CDC clients have tried to mitigate this problem within the constraints of NHP by using skilled architects and contractors as well as high-quality materials in the building/rehab process. Nonetheless, the ongoing maintenance and energy costs of homeownership continue to be a challenge.

This challenge is one that the CEDU is confronting with one of our CDC clients, Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation. The CEDU is helping Cypress Hills through the regulatory legal work necessary for them to be among the first organizations in New York to develop “green”

affordable housing. This housing will be affordable not only in its purchase price and mortgage payments, but also in its ongoing upkeep. Successful navigation through the regulatory process will result in the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) certifying these properties as “Energy Star Labeled Homes.”

GREEN BUILDING, IN EAST BROOKLYN?

Although the term “green housing” may conjure up ideas of high development costs, and untested technologies that may seem unnecessary and out of place in low-income communities, that's not an entirely accurate picture. Buildings simply built with better windows, insulation, ventilation, and with more efficient heating systems can cut gas and electric bills by as much as half. Given the high cost of energy today, this represents a significant savings for families that own affordable housing. Increasing building performance and decreasing energy use is also important for the environment, all the more so in low-income urban neighborhoods where asthma and other health problems are felt most severely.

These new cost-reduction and environmental benefits can be achieved without reducing the amount or quality of the affordable housing that CDCs can build. Meeting green standards has been found to increase development costs by an average of only 2.42%. Now, thanks to new incentives developed by NYSERDA and the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal, these additional costs can be partially subsidized. These new subsidies allow CDCs like Cypress Hills to build substantial quantities of affordable housing, while saving those new homeowners money on their energy bills and, at the same time, improving the environment in our communities.

Mike Haber is a Staff Attorney in Brooklyn A's Community & Economic Development Unit and an Equal Justice Works fellow sponsored by Greenberg Traurig LLP to work on affordable housing issues.

Gala 2006

Tuesday, November 14, 2006 at the Grand Ballroom of the New York Marriott Brooklyn was a special evening for Brooklyn A as it celebrated the organization's 38th Anniversary Gala Awards Benefit. Breaking all previous records, the Event raised over \$305,000. A sincere "Thank You" to all of our Friends and Supporters for their ongoing generous contributions in support of Brooklyn A's Partnership for Community & Economic Development.

More than 450 attendees came to honor three outstanding New Yorkers, and their commitment to legal services and community development: Robert C. Sheehan of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP (Top Photo: fourth from left), Terri Thomson of Citigroup Inc. (second from left), and Barbara Schliff of Southside United Housing Development Fund Corporation (Los Sures) (second from right).



PHOTO: VIRGINIE BLANCHERE

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