

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Our Impact	1
Message from the CEO	2
Message from Campaign Committee Member	2
Client Success Stories	3
Pro Bono Spotlight	3
14th Annual HeART of Giving Celebration	4-5
Leadership Circle Donors	6
Sustainers Monthly Giving Program	6
Legal Legend	7
The Legacy Society	7
Cocktails Under the Stars	8
Young Professionals Council	8



September 2023

LEGAL SERVICES IMPLEMENTS HEIRS' PROPERTY PRACTICE TO STRENGTHEN HOUSING & FINANCIAL STABILITY FOR HOMEOWNERS

The lack of affordable housing continues to be our community's most pressing challenge, and our team is on the frontlines standing up for low-income families who are living on the edge of losing their homes. Recently, we have focused on preserving access to affordable housing by **strategically integrating heirs' property work into the homeownership practice** within our Consumer Unit. Homeownership has long been a path to greater housing and financial stability.

Heirs' property, which generally refers to family-owned property that is inherited by multiple generations without formal legal proceedings, limits a family's ability to build intergenerational financial stability. As real property passes with each generation, title to it becomes increasingly fractionalized among all living heirs, making proof of ownership increasingly difficult and expensive. Although heirs' property is often mentioned as a rural issue, having been recognized **as a leading cause of significant involuntary land loss among Black landowners**, heirs' property likewise manifests in residential properties in urban areas like Miami-Dade County.

Our heirs' property initiative is made possible by funding from **BankUnited to educate and provide legal services to Liberty City residents** and funding from

the **Wells Fargo Foundation to do the same for all neighborhoods throughout Miami-Dade County**. Through the generosity of these financial institutions, our attorneys are **engaged in community education and the delivery of legal services, including the preparation of property deeds and wills**, for low-income homeowners so they can prevent their residence from becoming heirs' property. Where heirs' property already exists, **our attorneys also work with family members to take corrective measures to obtain clear title**. This advocacy **fosters homeownership stability**, which in turn provides the framework for low-income families **to accumulate and transfer intergenerational wealth**, through value appreciation, home equity and access to affordable financing.

To further this effort, our team has been proactively and effectively conducting outreach, specifically:

- Conducting **in-person community education presentations** addressing heirs' property to senior homeowners at local churches and community centers within the neighborhoods of Liberty City, Richmond Heights, and Miami Gardens. Collectively, we engaged **more than 500 residents** at these events.
- Planning several **community presentations addressing this topic** for this fall,

including events in Liberty City, Coconut Grove, Homestead, and Miami Gardens.

- Developing **relationships with local government officials and community organizations** to get the word out.
- **Collaborating with other legal services practitioners** throughout Florida, as well as with **members of the private bar, to develop best practices** or addressing heirs' property issues.

Thus far, we have **provided assistance to dozens of clients** who wish to put in place a formal plan for the intergenerational transfer of their home as well as others who possess heirs' property and need corrective measures to protect it. Our attorneys are **preparing "Lady Bird Deeds," which allow a homeowner to transfer their home upon their death through a recorded real estate deed, and Last Will & Testaments** so our clients have the peace of mind knowing that their intended beneficiaries will obtain title to the family home upon their death. Additionally, we are working on **complex cases that call for remediation of heirs' property**.

This area of advocacy for Legal Services is a new avenue for us to contribute to greater housing stability and the creation of intergenerational wealth in our client community.



From the Chief Executive Officer Monica Vignes-Pitan

As we continue to grow and meet the demand for housing advocacy, we also continue assessing opportunities and developing strategies and models that further advance equity and economic opportunity. In recent months, a commitment of resources in two distinct areas – Heirs’ Property and Special Education Law – have enabled us to broaden our advocacy efforts.

Heirs’ Property: For most of us, our home is our greatest financial asset. In fact, it is how most middle-class families increase their financial net worth. Our expansion into this practice, as highlighted in the cover article, is a step towards helping our clients build a path out of poverty. Funding from BankUnited and the Wells Fargo Foundation have made this possible.

Special Education: All of us either have or know a child with distinct educational needs that when given the appropriate services can thrive. Miami-Dade is the third largest school district in the country, and students with disabilities make up 12% of its student body. We have always advocated for greater education access as we want to ensure that every child receives the educational services he or she needs. MaryGrace Longoria was recently selected as a Skadden Fellow, and we are thrilled to now have an attorney, who is fully dedicated to this area.

We are committed to ensuring our client community has equal access to opportunities that will pave the way to success and financial stability. We are grateful to our donors, funders and partners who continuously support our efforts to get us one step closer.

How You Can Help

I was fortunate enough to be present at the earliest days of Legal Services. It was not an easy beginning, as a large percentage of lawyers in the organized Bar were deeply troubled with the notion of free “legal work” for poor people. To have been able to serve on the Board in the early years was a great honor, as I was privileged to see the leadership and the staff it had and how it has continued **to bring this organization forward to the present high regard it has on our community, and more importantly, the great good it has achieved for the less fortunate who live and work in this county.**

Today, housing affordability, the environment, and the lack of adequate and affordable transportation are a few of our community’s biggest challenges, and their **convergence further exacerbates the inequities.** Legal Services and its great staff advocate for greater access to housing stability through both preservation and development.

As our community moves forward during this transformational time, Legal Services will continue to help those impacted by these challenges. Legal Services has **always been a leader and unafraid to face challenges, both old and new.**

They need the support of all lawyers in every corner of this county. **All of us need to step up and contribute, both financially and with our expertise.** As lawyers, the need to assist those less fortunate is inherent in the oath we took.

We need your help!

Click [HERE](#) to make a gift today.

Robert L. Parks
Of Counsel, Garay Law



From Campaign Committee Member & Past Co-Chair Robert L. Parks

Legal Services Successfully Defends Single Mother in Retaliatory Eviction

WELLS FARGO

Wells Fargo's housing stability funding enables us to defend the rights of tenants like Sammy, a single mother, working and raising her teenage son. They live in subsidized housing, and when their unit became heavily affected by mold, the landlord refused to make repairs. Sammy turned to us for help, and Attorney Nerlande Joseph crafted a rent withholding letter to address the need for repairs. A few months later, the landlord filed an eviction in retaliation although Sammy had done nothing wrong.



Nerlande Joseph, Esq.

Attorney Sha'Tarria Davis defended her against the unlawful eviction. After months of litigation, Davis successfully negotiated a settlement to resolve the eviction. As a result, Sammy received half of the court registry funds, which represented a 50% discount on rent. She also received \$15,000 for the mold counterclaim. With our help, they are now beginning a new chapter! Sammy used the funds to find a safe, sanitary place to live elsewhere, and her son is in his first year of college. Safe housing gave this family security, a sense of well-being, and financial stability.



Sha'Tarria Davis, Esq.



Assists Nonprofit in Closing Loan to Develop Affordable Housing & Maximize Impact

Our Community Economic Development team recently closed a \$1 Million line of credit facility, including providing opinions of borrower and guarantor's counsel, for Neighborhood Housing Services of South Florida, Inc. (NHSSF) and its real estate development subsidiary. Both entities are long-time clients and provide a variety of housing and mortgage services to local low-income families, including the development of affordable housing. The credit facility will provide additional resources for NHSSF to acquire property to build and rehabilitate affordable single-family housing in South Florida.

In addition, we negotiated general contractor and home inspector agreements for NHSSF's weatherization contracts with Miami-Dade County and Florida Power & Light where NHSSF facilitates weatherization services for low-income homeowners, including new insulation, air-conditioning and other appliances to increase energy efficiency.

"Working with Legal Services has been a game changer for NHSSF. It is rare to have a legal services program that supports affordable housing work. We are fortunate to have their excellent team of lawyers to help us navigate complex real estate transactions. This allows us to minimize risk while delivering much needed affordable housing services to low-income residents," stated Kimberly T. Henderson, President and CEO.

Empowering Justice Through Pro Bono: \$175,000 Settlement for Wrongfully Evicted Senior

In a heartening victory for justice, pro bono attorneys at Barakat + Bossa secured a settlement of \$175,000 involving an elderly woman who faced three attempts to wrongfully evict her from her cherished family home. The unsettling story of murky title disputes and investor tactics has reached a positive resolution, highlighting the crucial role of legal advocacy in safeguarding vulnerable individuals.



Giacomo Bossa, Esq.

The client, in her 70s and battling age-related challenges, inherited her family home from her parents. Years later, an investor seemingly acquired the property, leading to her eviction. Guided by the dedication of pro bono attorney Giacomo Bossa, a specialist in business litigation and complex real estate law, Barakat + Bossa took on the intricate case to ensure justice prevailed.

BARAKAT + BOSSA

The legal battle involved a "Color of Title" suit, where notwithstanding an apparent deed to an investor, the client still had claim of ownership. Despite facing adversity, the client's resilience, coupled with the firm's unwavering commitment, resulted in substantial compensation to the client, who has now recovered the full monetary value of her family home and is being housed in an assisted living facility and protected by a pro bono guardian.

The case unraveled over the course of many years, with eviction and ejection actions filed by the original investor as well as change in title ownership challenges. The client's belongings were discarded, and her access was denied upon her return. Amidst the complexities, Barakat + Bossa persisted, filing a Quiet Title and an elderly abuse lawsuit to establish her rightful ownership against the initial title holder. The result: a \$175,000 settlement that is now helping the senior client as she navigates assisted living.

Reflecting on the case, Bossa emphasized, "Our victory is more than financial. It's about restoring dignity and quality of life to a person who didn't deserve such distress. We must always advocate for our elderly population who too often bear the brunt of such situations."

Barakat + Bossa, an international trial law firm, champions justice in cases spanning non-competes, commercial disputes, real estate matters, and corporate fraud. With a global reach, their commitment to upholding the rights of individuals shines through.

Legal Services is proud to work with pro bono attorneys like Mr. Bossa as his efforts and commitment to equal justice embody our ideals.

SUPPORT EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE THROUGH PRO BONO SERVICE

Follow Mr. Bossa's lead as well as countless other pro bono attorneys who give of their time and skills to create a meaningful impact.

PRO BONO OPPORTUNITIES

- Tenants' Equal Justice Clinic
- Key West Clinic

Mentorship and malpractice insurance provided.



The Fourteenth Annual HEART OF GIVING

From Our Hearts to Yours, THANK YOU for a Successful Heart of Giving Celebration!

Over 350 people representing the legal, business, and civic community gathered at the stunning **Rubell Museum** in the flourishing Miami Arts District on **May 18th, 2023**, at the **Fourteenth Annual Heart of Giving Celebration & Judicial Reception** to honor two esteemed leaders.

The **2023 Equal Justice Leadership Awards** were presented to **Alan G. Greer**, a prominent trial lawyer and former Miami partner at Day Pitney LLP, and **Dr. Pedro "Joe" Greer**, a distinguished doctor who established Camillus Health Concern and Saint John Bosco Clinic in Miami, and more recently the founding Dean of the Roseman School of Health Sciences in Las Vegas, for their outstanding contributions to the pursuit of justice.

Well-regarded **WPLG Local 10 Reporter and This Week in South Florida** host **Glenna Milberg**, served as Master of Ceremonies. **Legal Services CEO Monica Vignes-Pitan** delivered opening remarks, and awards were presented by Legal Services **Board Director Laura Zapata-Kim**, **Assistant General Counsel at Ryder, the Title Sponsor** and by the **Chair of this signature event, Lilly Ann Sanchez of The L-S Law Firm**.

During the elegant cocktail reception and silent auction, guests enjoyed specialty drinks from **E11EVEN Vodka, the exclusive liquor sponsor**, as well as a **mojito specialty bar sponsored by Miami Club Rum**.

We are incredibly grateful to our sponsors, guests and partners, for making our work and this event possible!

To learn more, [READ HERE](#) the press release published in The Florida Bar News.



Monica Vignes-Pitan, Craig Rasile, Valentina Gutches and Jeff Gutches



Judge Corali Lopez-Castro, Lilly Ann Sanchez, Rachel Furst and Jeff Bass



Monica Vignes-Pitan, Laura Zapata-Kim, Dr. Pedro "Joe" Greer (Honoree), Alan Greer (Honoree), Lilly Ann Sanchez (Event Chair) and Glenna Milberg (Master of Ceremonies)



Dr. Pedro "Joe" Greer gives remarks after receiving his award.



Alan Greer gives remarks after receiving his award.



H.T. Smith, Senior Judge Patricia Seitz and Tomas Gamba



Jack and Lori McLuskey



Glenna Milberg gets the crowd energized.

Celebration & Judicial Reception



Alexandra Barshel, Andres Rivero, Jennifer Fine and Christopher Noel



Alexandra Coupet, Michael Elkin, Brooke Zick and Avelino Rodriguez



Wifredo Ferrer, Judge Corali Lopez-Castro and Jordi Guso



Robert L. Parks, Monica Vignes-Pitan and Tomas Gamba



Gabrielle D'Alemberte, David Lawrence and Senior Judge Patricia Seitz



Laura Zapata-Kim, Raoul Cantero, Alejandro Uribe, Monica Vignes-Pitan, Juanita Alvarez and Aleida Martinez-Molina



Robert Powell, Janice Greer, Dr. Pedro "Joe" Greer, Alana Greer Garcia and Debbie Mucarsel-Powell



Melodie Munar, Jesika Diaz Munar, Karen Lapekas, Sairy Salazar and Donell Hicks



Mark Romance, Sarah Klim, Amanda Gomez, Manuel Garcia-Linares, Georgia Thompson, Andrew Ingalls and Rosana Belen Fernandez



Jacqueline Perez, Daniel Rowinsky, Jason Timmons, Gia Abreu O'Connor and Diana Mendez



Linda Kuijf, Fernando Diaz, Richard Fechter, Eilyn Ecarri and Jorge Guerrero



Lilly Ann Sanchez, Alan Greer, Senior Judge Patricia Seitz, Paul Lowenthal and Monica Vignes-Pitan



Judge Robert Watson, Judge William Altfield and H.T. Smith



Manuel Garcia-Linares, Mark Romance, Judge Beth Bloom and Judge Carroll Kelly



Raoul Cantero, Alejandro Uribe and Stephanie Carman

Our work is made possible through the generous support of our

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Donor levels reflect cumulative giving for the campaign period January 1, 2023 through December 31, 2025. As of 8/31/2023.

JOIN OUR MONTHLY GIVING PROGRAM & BECOME A SUSTAINER

Meet Our Sustainers

William Burdette
Marcia K. Cypen
Rachel Glade
Eric Hinz
David J. Petrantoni
Sandra Regner



Sandra Regner with her husband, Jim

Thank you to our monthly donors, the Sustainers! Your unwavering support is **instrumental in driving change and making a difference** in lives all over Miami-Dade and Monroe counties.

Long-time supporter, Sandra Regner says, “I’m proud of all of you. You do a service that is not about money; you HELP PEOPLE. And I’m proud of my association (however small) with Legal Services.”

Consider joining Sandra for effortless giving with consistent impact and amplified effect. You can make a difference all year long with a recurring gift of \$10 or more a month.

It’s easy to join online.

[CLICK HERE](#)

to make a one-time or recurring gift.

Legal Legend

In Memory of The Honorable A. Leo Adderly (1938-2023)



“Legal Services taught me how to practice law.”
— Judge Adderly

For almost six decades, Legal Services has been a beacon of hope offering legal support and economic stability to low-income families in South Florida. Our accomplishments are the legacy of the many trailblazers that served as staff attorneys during a time when systemic racial injustice still gripped the nation, fighting for justice. Their courage and achievements have left a mark on our community.

One of these legal legends was retired Miami-Dade County Court Judge A. Leo Adderly. Judge Adderly was a graduate of Howard University School of Law and part of the original nine trailblazing field attorneys in 1966 when we opened our doors. His unwavering commitment to access to equal justice and his generosity have played a vital role in driving our success and growth over the years. He remained a staunch supporter of Legal Services from its start, including serving as Board President in the early 1970s.

The entire Legal Services' family mourns the passing of one of our most influential and dedicated leaders. His legacy is an inspiring part of our history.

Join

THE LEGACY SOCIETY

The Legacy Society promotes the economic stability of our most vulnerable neighbors and builds a stronger community for generations to come. By making a bequest to Legal Services, you leave a legacy of empowerment, placing individuals and families on a stable path to the future.

We are thrilled to introduce and welcome some our **newest members of The Legacy Society** — Michele and Scott Baena, and Gisela Munoz and Daniel Baker. Their decision to create an enduring legacy through a planned gift demonstrates their unwavering commitment to our values and our mission. Through their support, we are equipped to make a lasting difference in the lives of families throughout Greater Miami.

Join The Legacy Society and transform someone's future.

Thank You for Paving the Way!

- Michele & Scott Baena
- Edie Laquer
- Jacqueline Allee Smith*
- Marcia K. Cypen
- Gisela Munoz & Daniel Baker



Daniel Baker & Gisela Munoz



Scott & Michele Baena

*Realized gift

PLEASE JOIN US

COCKTAILS UNDER THE STARS

OCTOBER 11, 2023 | 6:00 PM

Join us for a premier evening of fine wine, small bites, silent auction, entertainment and networking to benefit Legal Services of Greater Miami.

[REGISTER](#)

YOUNG PROFESSIONALS COUNCIL

The Council is the perfect way to give back while making friends and connections along the way. In addition to the many ways our Council supports our organization, this year **they hosted the inaugural Associates' Drive to raise crucial funds. Led by co-chairs Jennifer Fine and Christopher Noel**, associates from eight different Miami offices stepped up as team captains, spreading the word about the transformative work happening at Legal Services. The team captains **raised over \$10,000** which will directly fuel our mission.

Thank you, Young Professionals Council! Your dedication and commitment are inspiring.

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PHOTO (L): The Council celebrated a successful inaugural Associates' Drive with a happy hour at Wetlab. Pictured are **Council Chair Dan Humphrey** with fellow members, **Aaron Bibbee** and **Thomas Geeker**.

PHOTO (R): CEO **Monica Vignes-Pitan** and Council member, **Brianna Hathaway**, pose with **Judge Darrin Gayles** at our recent **Conversations with Leaders**, a series the Council hosts multiple times throughout the year.