

2008 Louis J. Goffman Award presented to York County Bar Foundation and York MidPenn Advisory Board

July 1, 2008

Since 1989, the Pennsylvania Bar Foundation, the charitable affiliate of the Pennsylvania Bar Association, has recognized and rewarded outstanding pro bono service with the annual presentation of the Louis J. Goffman Awards. This year, the Foundation honors the partnership of the York MidPenn Advisory Board and the York County Bar Foundation.

MidPenn Legal Services is a public interest law firm that serves 18 counties in Central Pennsylvania. Its civil legal aid office in York County has been providing free legal representation and information to low-income residents since 1969. Its staff serves a poverty population of nearly 30,000, advising and representing clients in the areas of custody, domestic violence, health care, consumer benefits and elder law; however over 50% of the York County caseload consists of family law matters. In 2006, of the 791 cases handled, nearly 60% were family law cases involving matters of custody, domestic violence, and child snatching. The demand for representation in these critical areas clearly outstripped the capability of the dedicated, yet small staff. Fortunately the York County MidPenn office had a plan and a group of committed volunteers to assist it in its efforts, namely the York MidPenn Advisory Board.

Created in 2002 by the MidPenn Legal Services Board of Directors, the York MidPenn Advisory Board is a cadre of local volunteer business leaders and lawyers committed to supporting the local MidPenn office. They have donated their time to assist in everything from clean-up and painting to modest fundraising, and lost no time taking on the challenge of raising \$250,000 to hire a family law attorney for the York MidPenn office.

Guided by the successful strategy employed by the Lancaster Bar Association Foundation, the York MidPenn Advisory Board created the York Family Law Campaign with a new twist. First, Advisory

Board Chair William C. Gierasch made contact with local business leader and philanthropist Robert W. Pullo. Mr. Pullo encouraged the Board to set a significant goal, but cautioned that the York philanthropic community would need to see attorneys in the forefront of the giving campaign. A meeting with the York County Bar Association and Foundation secured a promise of a \$25,000 per year matching grant for five years if the Advisory Board could raise an equal amount from York's business community.

And match they did!

Through a series of informational breakfast meetings convened and led by Advisory Board members, the local business community was soon educated, enthused and ready to support civil legal aid in general and the retention of a new family law attorney for the local office in particular. The campaign raised \$188,500, which was \$63,500 more than the challenge grant goal.

A new family law attorney was hired in October 2007, representing a 20% increase in the attorney staff. By the end of February 2008, the new attorney had handled 128 cases, serving 326 adults and children. MidPenn projects that the family law attorney will help over 1,500 families over the next five years.

Beyond the success of the fundraising effort and the positive impact the services of a dedicated family law attorney have already brought to those living in poverty in York County, a broad base of support for legal aid has been shaped and a genuine connection between the legal and business communities has been established all thanks to the collaboration of York MidPenn Advisory Board and the York County Bar Foundation.