

Winchester Attorney Is 2004 Legal Aid Lawyer of Year

By MATTHEW PHILIPS

VIRGINIA BEACH—Nancy Glickman is a legal aid lawyer, always has been, “always will be,” she said.

As the 2004 Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year, Glickman is recognized for a career in legal aid that extends across several state lines and back nearly 30 years to when she was a student at the Antioch School of Law in Washington, D.C.

“I was trying cases in law school,” Glickman said of her time at Antioch, which was set up in 1972 as a public interest law school and has since been subsumed by the University of the District of Columbia.

“The school was essentially a working legal aid office,” she said.

After such hands-on experience as a law student, Glickman was more than prepared to meet the needs of her clients by the time she entered the professional world. “I hit the ground running. I tried a case the week I was sworn into the bar,” she said.

That she also tried a case the afternoon of the day she gave birth to her first child gives one an idea of the dedication that has marked Glickman’s career as a legal aid lawyer, one that has taken her all across the country.

After graduating from Antioch, she began working in Columbus, Ga., as a staff attorney for Georgia Legal Services. She then moved to Evansville, Ind., to become the managing partner of Legal Services Organization of Indiana. Before coming to Virginia in 1989, Glickman moved once again to Asheville, N.C., where she worked as the litigation coordinator of Pisgah Legal Services of Western North Carolina.

For the last 15 years she has been the managing attorney of Blue Ridge Legal Services in Winchester. John E. Whitfield, executive director and general counsel of BRLS, nominated Glickman for the award this year, and clearly sees her as a deserving and vital member of the legal

aid community.

“Nancy Glickman is committed to helping the poor of this region and she richly deserves this recognition,” said Whitfield.

“She is the quintessential legal aid attorney, a jack of all trades with an outstanding win-loss ratio.”

By the nature of the work, and especially considering the disparity of pay between the public and private sectors, legal aid lawyers typically possess a certain something that draws them to the field. Glickman, a self-described “in-the-trenches legal aid lawyer” says her certain something came from the sense of equality that her parents instilled in her while she was growing up in New Rochelle, N.Y.

“I was raised in a family where it was a given that everyone should be treated equally. That was a constant theme.

“I strongly believe that poor people should have the same kind of representation as everyone else; that, just like everyone else in this country, they deserve to have their rights enforced and any wrongs redressed,” she said.

In talking about the origins of her belief in providing social justice for all citizens, Glickman also touched on the prevailing public attitudes of her early adulthood.

“There’s no question I was a product of a generation that was of the mindset that if you’re not part of the solution, you’re part of the problem,” said Glickman. “I haven’t wavered from that.”

As managing attorney of BRLS, and one of two lawyers in the Winchester office, Glickman stays busy. Along with a regular caseload and providing legal education seminars to the community when she can, Glickman spends her time circuit riding throughout BRLS’ extensive, mostly rural service area, one that includes an eligible client base of roughly 12,000 to 14,000 citizens.

Glickman estimates that she tries an average of 300 cases a year. “There’s always

work to be done; never a dull moment that’s for sure,” she said. “Unfortunately, we don’t have the resources to assist everyone, so we maintain a system of priorities. The problem lies in having only two attorneys for five localities.”

Through a special grant for domestic violence, BRLS’ Winchester office had maintained a third lawyer for a number of years. But last year the grant was not renewed, so the office had no choice but to trim its staff back to two lawyers.

“We’re picking up the slack,” said Glickman. “With that third lawyer though, expectations were definitely raised so we’re having to handle the stuff that had been created. We hate to reject people’s request for assistance, but with our lack of resources, we’re forced to make tough choices.”

Making matters worse, poverty is on the rise in the Shenandoah Valley, BRLS’ primary service area. “We’re dealing with a growing client base,” said Glickman. “There’s no question about that. The poverty population has increased from 1990 to 2000.”

With that increase, Glickman said, has come more recognition of the need for legal aid.

“We’re far more accepted now than we were 20 years ago. I’ve seen a discernable difference in how we’re viewed and that more people regard legal aid as an important part of the judicial system. That wasn’t the case when I started 26 years ago.”

Legal aid funding has grown in recent years, especially at the state level, but Glickman says that the need still far outweighs the appropriated resources.

“I am pleased that the state legislature recognizes the need and that a number of localities do as well. However, so much more could be done and often, it is the localities that aren’t doing enough. There’s a great disparity in how localities across the state fund legal aid and the fact remains that the poverty population con-



NANCY GLICKMAN
Committed legal-aider

tinues to grow and that funding is not in proportion.”

But despite any frustrations, Glickman professes her love for her work, maintaining that true successes are not measurable by a paycheck.

“I’ve been told I could make more money in the private sector, but so what,” said Glickman. “It’s important that I believe in what I do and that the time spent on cases is not measured by dollars, but by what I accomplish for my clients. It feels wonderful having a client tell you that if they had any money, they would get a real lawyer, and then by the end of the case, they’ve totally changed their tune.

“There’s nothing like representing a little guy against a big guy and winning; seeing people who may otherwise not have stood up for themselves get totally empowered by the help you’ve given them. That’s what renews my spirit and faith in what I’m doing,” she said.