

PRO BONO ATTORNEY OF THE MONTH



BY GAIL BRODER KATZ

Ronald M. Terenzi

The Safe Center LI (“TSCLI”) is proud to recognize Ronald M. Terenzi as the Nassau Lawyer July/August Pro Bono Attorney of the Month. He is being honored for the work he does on behalf of victims of domestic abuse and his special gift for putting them at ease during what is typically a very stressful time in their lives.

Mr. Terenzi is a founding partner at the Garden City Law firm of Stagg, Terenzi, Confusione and Wabnik, LLP, where he heads the commercial bankruptcy practice group as well as practicing in all areas of commercial litigation. He has written articles, appeared on news programs, given talks and chaired various symposia for professional organizations in the field of bankruptcy law and related topics. He also serves as a mediator and arbitrator for the Commercial Division of the State Supreme Court, Nassau County, as well as for the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Eastern District of New York.

We all have different reasons for going to law school; for many it was the fulfillment of a lifelong dream. Not Ron - he was not even interested in a career in the law and found his way to law school in a rather untraditional manner. After graduating the State University of New York at Old Westbury with a degree in music, Ron worked as a roofer during the day to pay the bills. This enabled him to pursue his passion for music, playing gigs in Greenwich Village and other locales at night. He was happy with his career choices, moving up the ‘ladder’ with the construction firm that employed him and continuing to perform with a variety of musicians. However, his life was in for a dramatic change. Unbeknownst to Ron, someone applied for him to take the LSAT. So with zero preparation, Ron woke up one morning and took the exam. He did very well and decided to get a few law school applications which he then stuck in a drawer. Later on, while packing for a vacation, he came upon the applications and decided to apply to two schools. Needless to say he was accepted and graduated from New York Law School, cum laude. Mr. Terenzi has now been practicing law on Long Island for 30 years serving a diverse commercial client base. He continues to play and perform his music with like-minded musicians because it is both his passion and spiritual relief.

TSCLI clients’ predominant needs for pro bono attorneys are typically in matrimonial and immigration matters. However, they often have other legal issues that stem from their relationship with an abusive partner. This is where Mr. Terenzi comes in. As an expert in bankruptcy law and commercial litigation he has assisted and advised clients with a variety of bankruptcy and consumer law issues. Since first joining the Pro Bono Project in 2011, he has represented and/or consulted with more than six clients.

Why do pro bono? According to Ron, this is the fun part of his legal career because he gets to interact and represent individuals, rather than the business concerns he usually deals with in his practice. He enjoys being able to help people with their basic needs and survival skills. These clients come in and are desperate for some help. They are not used to getting this level of representation and expertise that he can give to them. Ron finds his pro bono work most gratifying. He particularly enjoys helping TSCLI clients because he “really, really, really believes in the work that TSCLI does.” He feels that some of the most dangerous and evil people in our society have come from domestic abuse situations. Ron believes that the only way to stop some of this violence that has become so pervasive in the U.S. is at the source — domestic abuse.

Client testimonials are often a source for pride for attorneys. The following brief descriptions of his interactions with TSCLI clients will surely make Ron, and his firm, proud of his accomplishments in the pro bono world:

In Ms. X’s words, “Ron is a very nice, cool guy - very caring and kind.” The father of Ms. X’s child had accrued debt in her name that she had no way of paying and she was frantic with worry. She spoke with Ron who calmly told her not to worry and that everything would be okay. He helped her understand the situation and explained that they ‘can’t get blood from a stone’ which really reassured Ms. X. She felt he gave her excellent counsel and it was so uplifting to have somebody be so nice to her while she was going through such an awful time with the father of her son. She is so grateful for Mr. Terenzi’s help that she and her son “remember him in our prayers every night.” That is truly a testament to both his legal

acumen and his warm, caring persona.

Another client, Ms. Y, needed guidance regarding a possible bankruptcy and whether or not it made fiscal sense for her to file a Chapter 11. After consulting with the client, Ron advised me, somewhat reluctantly, that he was unable to represent her due to a conflict of interest. Even though he was not able to represent her, Ms. Y was most appreciative of the time he spent with her going over the issues and explaining what to expect in a bankruptcy. She too, commented on his kindness and was most effusive when describing his warm and caring nature.

Ron is also very active in various organizations on Long Island including past president and chair of the board of Advancement for Commerce, Industry and Technology “ACIT”, member of the Board of Trustees for the State University at Old Westbury, member of the Advisory Board for the College at Old Westbury’s School of Business, and a past member of the Board of Directors of the Nassau County Bar Association, as well as past chair of the Community Relations and Public Education Committee for the Bar Association.

Mr. Terenzi has been honored by both of his alma maters. In 2016 at its annual Gala, SUNY Old Westbury celebrated its 50th Anniversary with the theme “50 Alumni for 50 Years.” The honorees were chosen for the accomplishments they have achieved in their careers, the work and service they do in their communities or for the service they provide back to their alma mater. Ron was one of the 50 alumni so honored and without a doubt he possesses all three criteria.

In recognition of the 125th Anniversary of New York Law School, the school recognized Notable Alumni of the school. Ron was listed among the “Prominent Alumni” and his firm was one of only 34 firms to be so honored.

Beginning in 2015, the Nassau County Bar Association’s Access to Justice Committee in conjunction with TSCLI and Nassau/Suffolk Law Services has hosted a Pro Bono Recognition Reception at the Bar Association. The purpose of the event is two-fold: to thank the pro bono attorneys for their service and to publicly acknowledge the thousands of pro bono hours they have provided to underserved members of the community. Ron’s firm has consistently been recognized at the Reception as one of the top pro bono legal providers for the prior year.

Ron Terenzi is an asset not only to TSCLI clients, but to the community as a whole. His legal acumen and kind, caring disposition make him a perfect candidate for Pro Bono attorney of the Month. Please join us in congratulating him for this well-deserved honor.

Gail Broder Katz, Esq. is the Pro Bono Project Coordinator for The Safe Center LI (formerly Nassau County Coalition Against Domestic Violence.) She can be contacted at GBroderKatz@tscli.org or 516-465-4700 for information about the Project and how you can help.