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Nutter, McClennen & Fish attorney and SMLS Campaign Committee Co-chair, Michael Leon, designated SMLS as his charity of choice when his foursome recently won their firm-sponsored golf outing. SMLS was thrilled to receive the \$500 check from Nutter. Said Attorney Leon, "It would be great if each of us would put SMLS at the top of our charitable giving list."

SMLS' Newest Corporate Sponsor

Sovereign Bank, in Marlborough, has enthusiastically embraced SMLS and its mission, and joined other corporations and firms as a sponsor of the 2006 SMLS/Staples Golf Tournament. Marlborough Banking Manager Rebecca Bradt was the catalyst for this partnership. You might have seen her at the 50/50 hole the day of the event- she was the one actively soliciting golfers to participate in the contest- which raised a hefty \$500, five dollars at a time. Of her involvement with SMLS, Ms. Bradt says, "There is no other organization I'd rather be affiliated with. SMLS embodies the values that Sovereign holds dear- compassion to your neighbor and community support."

A New Look

Thanks to the creative team at Smith & Jones, we have a new logo, tagline and newsletter! SMLS was one of six Massachusetts nonprofits chosen to be a part of CreateATHon 2006. Advertising agencies across the country participated in the creative week to provide pro bono marketing, advertising and public relations to nonprofits with little or no marketing budgets. Sturbridge-based Smith & Jones worked on 15 projects valued at about \$45,000. "Updating our image was long overdue," says SMLS Development Coordinator Janice Camp. "We wanted the new look to evoke a sense of trust, compassion and competence, and to more accurately reflect our organization's mission." Tell us what you think!

Towns served by SMLS: Acton, Ashland, Bedford, Bellingham, Canton*, Carlisle, Concord, Dedham, Dover, Foxboro, Framingham, Franklin, Holliston, Hopkinton, Hudson, Lexington, Lincoln, Marlborough, Maynard, Medfield, Medway, Millis, Natick, Needham, Norfolk, Northborough*, Norwood, Plainville, Sharon, Sherborn, Southborough*, Stow, Sudbury, Walpole, Wayland, Wellesley, Westborough*, Weston, Westwood, Wrentham

*Elders Only



The Legal Pad

SMLS articles, profiles and news briefs

South Middlesex Legal Services

Fall 2006

A Message from the Director

Two people sit in the SMLS waiting room. They seem very different.

- Lena is a frazzled mother, her bag stuffed with toys, crayons, and sippy cups. She is anxious to get back to work as quickly as possible.
- James is a crisp-looking veteran of the Gulf War. Looking at him, you cannot see his prosthetic leg. James has nowhere to go after this appointment.

Yet James and Lena have much in common. A life event that came without warning pushed each of them to the edge. James suffered severe depression after his National Guard unit returned from Afghanistan, lost his job, and began to drown in rising debt. Lena's marriage ended suddenly during her daughter's severe illness, plunging this mom of two into poverty. They each carry papers—legal and financial documents—that, to them, seem mysterious. They share a feeling of desperation about their legal situation. They both told the receptionist they have been praying that SMLS can help them.

Who did we help today? James. Lena. They were quickly replaced in the waiting room by three more: a victim of domestic violence accompanied by a shelter worker; a father whose seven year old son cannot read but was denied special education services; a senior citizen swindled out of her home by her caretaker. Our cases today are typical of the thousands of people who come to us desperate for help. They come to us with one thing in common: with nowhere else to turn, they look to SMLS for guidance. For 30 years, thanks in large part to you, our donors, we've offered families and individuals legal advice and representation, giving them the tools to make lasting changes.

Who will we help tomorrow? Since 1976, SMLS has been the last refuge of desperate and courageous people. I am very proud of the work of our staff, board, and volunteers. But the sad truth is, for every person who receives our help, another can't be served, not because his or her case isn't urgent, but because SMLS lacks the funds. Like other legal aid offices, federal and state dollars have not kept pace with our program's costs. It would take hundreds of thousands of dollars and twice the number of advocates to serve the many individuals we are unable to help. We believe passionately that justice is not a privilege, but a right. If you could see the courage and determination on the faces of our clients you would understand why we are so committed to our mission. By helping one neighbor at a time, we can come closer to achieving our goal. And with perseverance and luck, SMLS will be around for another 30 years.

- Nancy King

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South Middlesex
Legal Services
On your side

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Campaign Update

Rain Delay Dampens Outing but Not Enthusiasm

A water-logged course and the threat of no carts prevented the SMLS annual golf tournament from going off as planned on May 22. The event, held for the ninth year at the Framingham Country Club, was rescheduled to the end of June. "It would have been a disaster," said country club member and former SMLS Campaign Committee Co-chair Ralph Lepore, "for both the club and the players. Postponing it was absolutely the right thing to do." Fortunately, June 26 dawned bright and clear. Despite a smaller field of golfers and fewer sponsors, the tournament brought in \$30,000, not quite the \$47,000 raised in last year's tournament. Thanks to ongoing corporate support from Staples, the presenting sponsor, and Nutter McClennen & Fish, the platinum sponsor. Congratulations to the event's winners.



Top: Bentley College student James Gabriel won the men's Closest to the Pin contest.
Right: Tena Heffernan, of the VP Solutions foursome won the women's Closest to the Pin contest. Shown here with Rob Schoen (left) and Dennis Levine.



Left: SMLS Office Manager Liz Parra reacts to the news that she placed the winning bid for a pair of Red Sox tickets.

Cutting-Edge Fundraiser Keeps Donors Clicking

While colleagues cursed their misfortune at having to attend yet another fundraising event, SMLS supporters sat smugly by their computers, ready to pounce should someone make a move to outbid them. This past March, SMLS launched its first Online Auction. Over a three week period, 150 participants from all over the country scanned, shopped and selected auction items from a catalog

of more than 100 offerings. Bargains abounded (an auto-graphed Carl Yastrzemski photo sold for \$260; a designer sweater for \$95), yet the auction netted \$22,000 to support SMLS, \$2,000 over our goal. To SMLS and its clients, \$22,000 will allow our advocates to do what they do best: keep a struggling family off the street, protect a mother and her children from abuse, and enable a homeless vet to receive

retroactive funds and health care coverage. Thank you to all for making this event a success! In the words of SMLS donor and online auction enthusiast, Alda Ledoux, "[I] loved monitoring the auction bids and reaching the finish line stealthily, surreptitiously and victoriously. It was a wonderful venture." Thanks go to the Peter Condakes Company for underwriting the auction.

Client Story

SMLS Paralegal Brings Client "Back from the Dead"

A glitch in the Social Security system labeled Barbara Keesan of Hopkinton as deceased. To most people, being considered dead by Social Security would mean an end to their monthly check. To Barbara, it meant life or death.

The bureaucracy's error resulted in an end to Barbara's Medicare. A cancer survivor with one lung, Barbara needed a constant supply of oxygen to stay alive. Panicked, she called Social Security, hoping to erase her "death" from the record. Instead, she got entangled in a web of red tape. When call after call proved ineffective, Barbara took a more direct tack. "I actually went in to the Social Security office. I thought I would walk in alive and kicking and see if that would do any good." It didn't.

By then, Barbara says, she had called everyone and gotten nowhere. At this point, an elder services case manager referred her to South Middlesex Legal Services. SMLS Paralegal Fran Bakstran assessed the situation and was quick to organize a conference call with Barbara, the oxygen supplier and herself. Says Ms. Bakstran, "The immediate goal was to be sure Barbara's oxygen deliveries would continue. Then we could work on putting her back into the system."

While the problem was relatively simple to find, it was much more difficult to fix. In addition to the oxygen supply company, Ms. Bakstran put calls in to Social Security, Medicare and the Department of Medical Assistance. Because of limitations on sharing information among agencies, it was necessary to fax separate releases to each agency. Eventually, the problem was resolved and Barbara's name was removed from the deceased list. Barbara was deeply relieved to learn that her bills would continue to be paid and her oxygen supply was once again safe.

Looking back, Barbara is particularly appreciative of SMLS' efforts. "They fought hard for me and I'm grateful. I honestly don't know what I would have done without them," she said, and added with a chuckle, "They were able to get me back among the living."



Barbara Keesan

"I decided to look at my Medicare bill...and I almost fell off my chair! I said, 'OK, they think I'm dead.'"

Every month, SMLS provides legal advice and representation to hundreds of residents in the greater MetroWest area who have serious civil legal problems and nowhere else to turn. For every client helped, another must be turned away, not because of ineligibility, but because of a lack of resources.

