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Newsroom

PBC Honors Mark Mandell

The Providence lawyer's transformative gift helped the Pro Bono Collaborative provide thousands of the neediest with essential legal services – and it's still growing.



BRISTOL, R.I., October 20, 2014 – As America's legal profession shines a spotlight on the importance of making quality legal services available to the neediest populations, Roger Williams University School of Law is celebrating the man whose passion and generosity established a solid financial foundation for its innovative Pro Bono Collaborative program.

Originally launched in January 2006 with support from the Rhode Island Foundation, the Pro Bono Collaborative (PBC) at RWU Law was in need of resources to expand in 2011. Having participated in the program for several years, and convinced of the importance of its efforts, prominent Providence attorney Mark Mandell decided that the program was worthy of assistance. "The work is just too important," he says. "The gap between wealthy and poor has grown so astronomically in our country in the last 25 years that we just can't forget people in need."

Mandell's response? A transformative \$250,000 challenge grant that has helped sustain the program ever since. "The folks who work at the PBC are such incredibly fine people – so dedicated to this cause," he says. "And it's so important that we teach our law students the importance of pro bono work – because when you pay attention to an issue, its magnitude, the number of students involved, and the amount of time people invest in it will always increase."

That is precisely the thinking behind National Pro Bono Celebration Week, celebrated this year during the week of October 19-25, 2014. Over the past five years, the ABA's Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service has hosted the celebration each fall. Mandell believes it's also an ideal occasion to spotlight Roger Williams's leadership in the field.



"RWU Law is way ahead of the curve on pro bono work," he says. "The PBC is a model for the rest of the country, and a lot of other law schools see the PBC in that way. It has helped make the pro bono program at Roger Williams one of the hallmarks of the school."

Indeed, according to RWU Law Dean Michael Yelnosky, the Association of American Law Schools recently highlighted the PBC on its inaugural website featuring innovative law school programs. "The PBC is – and this is not just my opinion, it is a fact – a nationally recognized program," he said. "Without Mark's generosity, it would not be what it is today."

What makes the PBC different is its unique approach, which brings together private law firms, law students and community nonprofit organizations that serve the poor and disadvantaged. "What makes the model so striking," Mandell notes, "is that it takes these three different universes and provides a structure that enables them to effectively and efficiently work together."

Not only does the program help the needy, Mandell adds; it helps law students in essential ways. "It's all about doing the right thing," he said. "It's about quality of life; living according to true values; paying respect to all people, and not just those of means. It's about understanding what our purpose on earth really is, and that's to help each other. Unfortunately, we get so caught up in the day-to-day details of life that we too often lose sight of what really matters."

In the future, Mandell says, he hopes to see the PBC's reach grow, "providing as much service as we can to as many people as possible." As for his own involvement with the program, he added, "I don't expect it to ever end."

“Mark’s generosity has enabled the PBC to bring pro bono legal assistance and expertise to thousands of low-income people in Rhode Island,” added Eliza Vorenberg, the program’s director at RWU Law. “I am so pleased to recognize Mark’s impact during National Pro Bono Celebration Week.”

With a legal career that spans four decades – including stints as president of the Association of Trial Lawyers of America and the Rhode Island Bar Association – and an impressive array of million-dollar-plus verdicts and settlements (including, most prominently, his representation of victims of the Station nightclub fire) populating his résumé, Mark Mandell is one of the region’s top legal practitioners.

From 2010 to 2014, he was Chairman of RWU Law’s Board of Directors, further strengthening its already deep connections with the bench and bar. “We have a symbiotic, mutually complementary relationship,” he noted. “That helps us to attract talented adjuncts, opens doors to internships and jobs, and gets so many of our wonderful judges involved. Students would never have the opportunity to gain that wisdom in any other state – not at the level they do at Roger Williams.”