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Roger Williams University School of Law

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Newsroom

Major Gift Boosts Legal Services for Communities in Need

A prominent Rhode Island attorney was honored Thursday for a \$250,000 challenge gift supporting Roger Williams University School of Law in its mission to increase pro bono legal services for the state's most needy and vulnerable communities.



BRISTOL, R.I., Oct. 26, 2009 – A prominent Rhode Island attorney was honored Thursday for a \$250,000 challenge gift supporting Roger Williams University School of Law in its mission to increase pro bono legal services for the state's most needy and vulnerable communities.

Providence lawyer Mark Mandell was recognized at a Bristol reception hosted by Roger Williams University President Roy J. Nirschel, Ph.D., and Dean David A. Logan of RWU School of Law, for his generous support of the Law School's Pro Bono Collaborative (PBC), a program that facilitates public interest collaborations between local law firms, community organizations and students at Roger Williams University School of Law.

"From our undergraduate through our graduate programs, and very much including our School of Law, Roger Williams University is dedicated to cultivating globally aware, service-minded citizens who want to create a more just, equitable and sustainable world," President Nirschel said. "The PBC's invaluable work goes to the very heart of that mission."

Mandell agreed. "Doing pro bono work combines the reality of legal justice with the principles of social justice, and what can mean more than that?" he said.

The PBC partners Rhode Island law firms and RWU law students with community-based organizations to provide project-based pro bono legal assistance to some of Rhode Island's most vulnerable populations. Since its inception in 2006, the PBC has engaged 10 law firms, more than 50 attorneys and 60 law students, and 28 community-based organizations to provide pro bono legal services. To date it has

leveraged approximately 500 hours of pro bono service from the Rhode Island legal community, including some of its top firms. RWU Law students have, for their part, contributed 1,900 hours of work.

“To my knowledge, the PBC is the only pro bono program in the country that provides legal service to low-income people through this sort of three-way collaboration between law firms, a law school and community organizations,” said Dean Logan.

In addition, Mandell’s gift lays out a matching challenge to the Rhode Island legal community to double his donation. Eliza Vorenberg, director of the PBC, noted that the timing of Mandell’s gift and challenge fortuitously coincides with the American Bar Association’s National Pro Bono Celebration Week (Oct. 25 through 31, 2009), which is dedicated to “educating the public and recruiting more pro bono attorneys to meet the ever-growing legal needs of our nation’s most vulnerable citizens,” and thereby helping to “make equal justice a reality.”

Mandell said the PBC’s work illustrates the attitude and willingness to innovate that makes RWU Law so vital to Rhode Island’s bar and bench. “The law school is a beacon for all judges, attorneys and citizens who are participants in our system of justice,” he said. “I think that RWU Law is as important as any academic institution in the state of Rhode Island.”

Mandell, a former president of both the Rhode Island Bar Association and the Association of Trial Lawyers of America (ATLA), currently sits on the Rhode Island Supreme Court Ethics Advisory Panel and has served on the Governor’s Advisory Commission on Judicial Appointments, among many other posts. A longtime supporter of RWU Law, Mandell not only teaches trial advocacy at the school, but also sits on its advisory board and in 2008 joined its Board of Directors. In addition, he is the proud father of Zach Mandell, a second-year law student at Roger Williams; and this fall he was welcomed onto Roger Williams University’s Board of Trustees.

“I’ve always believed in the Abraham Lincoln approach to law,” Mandell said. “You do it with honor and integrity, you represent your clients as zealously as possible, and you give back. It’s great to make a living, but the thread that winds through all of it is serving the public good.”