

# BET TZEDEK NEWS

A NON-PROFIT LAW CENTER PROVIDING FREE LEGAL REPRESENTATION TO LOW-INCOME, ELDERLY AND DISABLED RESIDENTS OF LA COUNTY.



Summer Enewsletter | July 30, 2009

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*For privacy reasons, all clients' names have been changed.*

## HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS JUSTICE NETWORK (HSJN) RECEIVES AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION'S HIGHEST PRO BONO AWARD

The Holocaust Survivors Justice Network is one of five national recipients of the ABA's Pro Bono Publico Award. To date, the Justice Network has reached 30 cities, engaged the services of more than 4,000 volunteers, and assisted over 5,000 survivors.

At its annual meeting in early August, the American Bar Association will bestow one of its five national Pro Bono Publico Awards upon the Holocaust Survivors Justice Network. The Justice Network, created 18 months ago in conjunction with Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, LLP, recognized a need among survivors and responded with an innovative program unlike anything the pro bono world has seen.

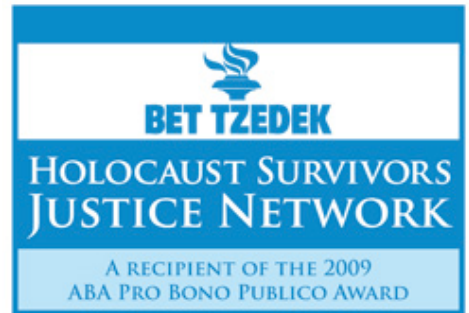
The award reflects the incredible contributions of thousands of volunteers and their law firms, companies and social service agencies. All of the Justice Network's participants contribute their talents to ensure that survivors can live their lives in dignity. Survivors nationally already have received several million dollars in reparations because of the Justice Network.

For more information about the Justice Network, visit [www.holocaustsurvivorsprobono.org](http://www.holocaustsurvivorsprobono.org).

## BET TZEDEK FEATURED IN JEWISH JOURNAL COVER STORY

The July 17th edition of The Jewish Journal featured Bet Tzedek in the cover story, "Bankruptcy." Joey Alarcon, staff attorney, and Nora Ghamari, paralegal, describe the changes they've seen in our bankruptcy and consumer practice. To see the cover and read the article, visit [www.bettzedek.org](http://www.bettzedek.org).

## KINSHIP CARE PROJECT KEEPS FAMILY TOGETHER



The Costello family is a perfect example of how Bet Tzedek's Kinship Care keeps grandparents and the grandchildren they're raising together.

Mr. & Mrs. Costello are the paternal grandparents of a 10-year-old girl who was abandoned by her parents. After spending the first weeks of her life with a maternal aunt, the girl came to live with the Costellos when she was three months old. Since then, the Costellos have provided a stable and loving home for her.

The child's mother lives in a nearby town within Los Angeles County, and the Costellos tried to encourage her to maintain a relationship with her daughter. Unfortunately, the mother's lack of interest and inconsistency resulted in infrequent and unpredictable contact. The child did have a more regular relationship with her father, but he passed away last June.

The Costellos came to Erikson Albrecht, the Director of the Kinship Care Project, for assistance in obtaining legal guardianship for their granddaughter. Prior to filing the petition, however, the child's mother forcibly removed her from the Costello home. This sudden and dramatic upheaval was highly traumatic for the little girl. She called her grandparents every night and begged them to take her back. She even started skipping recess at school so she could call them every afternoon.

After speaking with the Costello family and several school officials, Erikson filed a petition for temporary legal guardianship. He actively solicited and received approximately thirty letters of support on behalf of the Costello family, including several letters from professionals within the childhood development and education field.

Fortunately, the court recognized the detriment caused to the child by the sudden removal from the only home she had known. In early June, the Costellos became permanent legal guardians of their granddaughter and do not have to fear that they will be separated again.

## ELDERLY WOMAN ABLE TO RETURN HOME

After being assaulted in her home and then defrauded by a family friend, 94-year old Eleanor Wideman was left without hope. Bet Tzedek attorney Anna Burns and legal secretary Connie Heth aided Ms. Wideman in recovering her home and a measure of peace.

Eleanor Wideman, then 92, was home alone one evening in 2006. A stranger broke into her home and began strangling her. Mrs. Wideman survived the attack, but she spent significant time in the hospital.

In the aftermath of such a traumatic event, a young man who Ms. Wideman trusted took advantage of her fragile state, and tricked her into signing the house over to him. Much to Ms. Wideman's horror, she soon discovered that the young man had taken out a loan against her home and that her house now belonged legally to him.

Understanding both the legal issues and the emotional toll the case took on Ms. Wideman, Bet Tzedek attorney Anna Burns and legal secretary Connie Heth did a fantastic job in making sure Ms. Wideman received what was rightfully hers. After thorough preparation and a trial, Ms. Wideman won back her house, with improved loan terms as an additional benefit. Ms. Wideman now can live her remaining years in her own home.

## LAW CLERK WINS JUSTICE FOR WORKERS

Bet Tzedek summer law clerk Eli Tirosh was successful in her first hearing at the Labor Commissioner. She was able to win awards claims totaling \$17,000 for two construction workers who were denied compensation for their labor.

After two weeks of hard labor, Demetrio and Juan were appalled to find their work go unpaid. The two construction workers had put in more than 50 hours of work each week, but their employer refused to pay them. They did receive one check, but later found that it bounced.

Bet Tzedek came to Demetrio and Juan's aid by way of our summer law clerk, Eli Tirosh. Eli is a 1L at the University of San Francisco School of Law and is part of Bet Tzedek's summer class of 31 clerks (Bet Tzedek's largest class ever).

Eli filed a wage claim with the State Labor Commissioner and then spent several weeks working with the clients. Eli also conducted the direct examinations and presented a clear and effective case that helped bring her clients justice.

In the end, Demetrio and Juan were awarded their full wages, rest break premiums, as well as waiting time penalties and penalties for the bad check. In total, the two workers received more than \$17,000. Thanks to Eli's tireless work, these workers received their lawful wages and a dishonest employer was brought to justice.

## FAMILY CONSERVATOR TRAINING DAY IS A HUGE SUCCESS

On May 30th, 150 participants attended a Family Conservator Training Day, hosted by Bet Tzedek's Family Caregiver Project.

Training days such as these gather volunteers and participants together for an important day of information sharing and peer support. Bet Tzedek's advocates teach attendees about available legal and community services for caregivers and encourage caregivers to reach out for the help they need to continue serving their loved ones.

Thanks to the volunteers and program planners, participants received the knowledge they need to better care for their loved ones. Special thanks to O'Melveny & Myers LLP for underwriting the Training Day.

## THE SEVELLS: CELEBRATING BET TZEDEK WHEN YOU CELEBRATE LIFE EVENTS

Rob Sevell is a partner at Foley & Lardner LLP. His son, Adam, is following in his footsteps as a lawyer. Adam recently graduated from UCLA Law School and will begin at the firm of Paul Hastings LLP in 2010. When Rob and his wife threw a graduation party for Adam, they decided to ask attendees for donations to Bet Tzedek in lieu of gifts.

"We know of Bet Tzedek's great work and we wanted to help," said Rob. "This seemed like a way to introduce the organization to our friends and to celebrate Adam's future life as a lawyer."

The Sevels helped raise money for Bet Tzedek, and Adam will continue to help our clients this fall while serving as a volunteer at our Fairfax office.

For more information about life event gifts, please call Matt Scelza at 323.549.5813.

## OPI CONNECTS WITH BET TZEDEK – AND THE COMMUNITY

Suzi Weiss-Fischmann is known as the First Lady of Nails, because she single-handedly creates every OPI Nail Lacquer shade based on each season's fashion and beauty forecast. Of course there's much more to Suzi than her creativity and business savvy. Suzi – and all of the folks at OPI Products Inc. – are also known for their philanthropy and commitment to giving back through the Schaeffer Family Foundation.

Suzi's parents both survived the Holocaust and then lived through hard times in Hungary before emigrating to the United States. Suzi connected with Bet Tzedek through our Holocaust Services Unit and our work to ensure that no survivor lives in poverty. The Schaeffer Family Foundation recently gave a substantial gift to Bet Tzedek toward these efforts. In addition, OPI has generously donated bottles of one of its signature nail lacquers – "Dress to Empress" – to be included in this year's swag bag for *The Justice Ball*.

We are extremely grateful to Suzi, OPI and the Schaeffer Family Foundation for its support of Bet Tzedek and for all of the ways that they give back to the community.

## THE JUSTICE BALL® XIII A GREAT NIGHT FOR A GREAT CAUSE - MORE THAN \$300,000 RAISED FOR BET TZEDEK'S PROGRAMS

The Justice Ball XIII was held on Saturday, July 25, 2009. More than 2,000 partied the night away to the sounds of DJ AM. There was music, dancing, speed dating

# O·P·I



and much more! Thanks to everyone who attended, to all of our generous sponsors and to the fabulous Justice Ball Committee! We will be posting photos on our website shortly...be on the lookout!



Bet Tzedek is an affiliated agency of  
The Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles

