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## LA Office Sets Down Roots in Community

As the firm's Los Angeles office has grown to critical mass and filled out its space, so too has it deepened its connections with the surrounding community. This spring, the office marked its first year at its Bunker Hill location by reaching out to organizations that protect the rights of abused and impoverished children and feed the hungry in LA County. In May, the office established a pro bono relationship with The Alliance for Children's Rights (the Alliance), and that same month attorneys and staff banded together to provide office-wide support for Food from the Bar, a program that organizes donations and volunteers from the legal industry to help the Los Angeles Regional Foodbank.

"We have been discussing a pro bono program in the LA office since May of 2008," says Litigation and Securities Senior Associate Caroline Kane, who is helping to coordinate the firm's relationship with the Alliance. "We decided to pick one organization to begin with, because the office is so small, but we wanted to have a program in place, because of the firm's—and our—commitment to pro bono." Individual members of the office were already handling various pro bono matters prior to the forging of the office's relationship with the Alliance, Kane points out, but the office felt it was important to make a larger-scale organizational commitment to a particular cause.

"In February and March of this year we began discussing the types of organizations with which we'd like to work, and we brainstormed a number of different ideas," Kane explains. "Everyone in the office participated and we came up with four organizations, to whom we reached out to see what programs they had and how they would fit in with the office." The organizations under consideration focused on issues ranging from children's rights to progressive policy, the environment and traditional public interest law, but the Alliance was ultimately chosen based on the range of programs it offered. Its focus on children also dovetails nicely with that of the firm's Youth and Education Initiative on the East Coast, notes Kane, who began her career with the firm in the Boston office before moving to LA.

The Alliance offers the opportunity for firm attorneys to handle adoption and guardianship cases, and to advocate for children with learning disabilities or developmental delays who need Individual Education Plans to ensure that their special needs are met within their school districts.

The organization kicked off its relationship with the firm with an orientation and training meeting on June 1, at which members of the office, including its three summer associates, signed up to handle

four adoption cases that will be finalized on July 31. On this day, the Edmund D. Edelman Children's Court in Los Angeles will focus exclusively on adoption cases, and adoptive parents and their children will gather from across the city to finalize their adoptions. The four cases being handled by the firm involve children ranging from one to eleven years of age who are being formally adopted by relatives with whom they had previously been placed in foster care.

"I'm really excited that it's not just going to be us there on the day that we go to do the adoption at the courthouse," says Summer Associate Derek Gosma, who is handling the case of a 7-year-old boy being adopted by his paternal aunt, and will meet his clients face-to-face for the first time on July 31. "The courthouse is going to shut down completely apart from doing adoption cases, so it will be a special day. I can't adequately express how excited I am to be able to get this adoption done for the adoptive mother and for the child."

Enthusiasm was equally high when the office took part in the Los Angeles Regional Foodbank's "Food from the Bar" program in May. The Foodbank, which states that one out of every eight people in LA County is at risk of hunger, sources millions of pounds of surplus food that would otherwise go to waste and channels it to approximately 700,000 recipients throughout LA County each year, with the help of volunteers.

"There were three components of our involvement in 'Food from the Bar'," explains Litigation Associate Amanda Walker, who organized the firm's participation in the campaign and is also supervising one of the summer associates on an adoption case. "First, we raised money for the Foodbank; second, we collected food donations; and third, we went out and participated in a big volunteer day where we were part of an assembly line putting together food packages that the Foodbank then distributed to seniors in the community."

The office, with its population of 19, including both attorneys and staff, raised approximately \$1,100 for the Foodbank, which—due to its relationships with food industry growers, packers, processors, manufacturers, wholesalers, brokers and retailers—is able to distribute \$5 worth of groceries for every dollar donated. Office members also contributed a large bin of food donations and assembled a nine-person team for the volunteer day at the Foodbank's warehouse on May 30. Volunteering on behalf of the firm were Project Assistant Vikki Gonzalez; Litigation Senior Associate Michael Jay; Partner-in-Charge of the LA Office Randall Lee; Support Site Specialist Joseph Pucci and his significant other, Carmen; Litigation and Securities Associate Bethany Stevens and her husband, Andy; and Walker and her husband, John.

"It was some serious work," says Walker, who describes a vigorous shift on the assembly line, where WilmerHale volunteers bagged peaches and checked food packages for quality control. "Everyone seemed pretty happy to be there. I think there was just good energy."





*(LA attorneys and staff pitch in at local foodbank.)*