

Marquette lawyers and the Milwaukee Justice Center

At the intersection of need and help, the Milwaukee Justice Center is being built. Marquette is involved in a big way—from Marquette lawyers to Marquette Law School students and staff and even Marquette undergrads.

The need has two key elements. First, the people: Thousands of low-income residents of Milwaukee County, whose situations bring them to the civil courts for what are, in the big picture, small matters. They generally cannot afford to hire lawyers, and more than 80 percent of those eligible for free legal services are not able to obtain them. Second, the system: Without guidance or help available to them, the people, their unfamiliarity with legal processes, and their cases impose a big load on the functioning of the courts.

An increasingly valuable part of a solution: The Milwaukee Justice Center, based in the Milwaukee County Courthouse and offering thousands of people free resources to guide them toward accomplishing what they need. People are able to get brief legal advice from volunteer attorneys. Launched in 2008, the Justice Center is a collaboration of the Milwaukee Bar Association (and its foundation), Marquette University Law School, and Milwaukee County.

And at the heart of the solution: The people who get involved. The center is “a shining example of what happens when people work together,” says executive director Dawn Caldart. As a way of applauding the many who are involved, we spotlight four with particular Marquette Law School connections.

Dawn R. Caldart

After working at Kohl’s for about a decade, Dawn Caldart, L’01, wanted new challenges. She considered a career in the health field but, while working at Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin, became interested in the intersection of health and the law. That led her to attend Marquette Law School and become actively involved in pro bono efforts. Caldart worked in private practice and for the AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin for several years.

In 2007, she and her husband, Tom, adopted two children from Ethiopia. “They have just filled us up in ways we didn’t know that were missing,” she says. After taking a break from work, she returned to law, looking for something that also would be fulfilling. She says she has found it as executive director of the Milwaukee Justice Center.



Laura Now, Michael Hupy, Dawn Caldart

The center served about 6,600 people in 2010, about 8,000 in 2011, and is expected to go beyond 10,000 this year, Caldart says. Its service includes self-help desks staffed by volunteers, including Marquette undergrads, and clinics on Thursdays and Fridays in which attorneys, many from major law firms, offer legal advice. Marquette law students work with the attorneys and help in other roles. The large majority of people who come to the center need help with family law matters. Landlord-tenant issues and small claims matters are also common.

The Milwaukee Justice Center “really exemplifies Marquette’s mission” of helping others, Caldart says. As for her own role, she says, “Every day, I wake up, I get to do what I love, I get to help people, I get to work collaboratively to grow this project. I feel so fortunate.”

Michael F. Hupy

Michael Hupy, L'72, is one of the most widely known lawyers in Milwaukee. He has won multimillion dollar personal injury cases for clients, and his firm has eight offices in Wisconsin and Illinois. But law practice is about more than your own cases and clients, he says.

"There are a lot of people who cannot afford legal services but have to have them," Hupy says. "I believe there are times when duty calls and we must stand up to the plate to fulfill our professional obligations."

Hupy and his firm, Hupy & Abraham, have supported many charitable causes. But he relates that he was not really familiar with the Milwaukee Justice Center when Michael J. Skwierawski, a former Milwaukee County judge, and Michael J. Cohen, L'86, a partner with Meissner, Tierney, Fisher & Nichols, called on him to talk about the center. Skwierawski and Cohen have helped lead the Milwaukee Bar Association's support of the Justice Center.

Within a day, Hupy responded with a commitment to give the center \$100,000 over three years.

"What I hope to accomplish is to provide legal services to as many people who can't afford them as possible," Hupy said. "We have an obligation, a duty, a need, and more of us need to realize that we're not here to make money; we're here to help our clients and serve the public."

Laura J. Now

When Laura Now, L'10, was working as a project assistant at a law firm in Chicago, she participated in a number of community service projects supported by the firm, including organized running events and charity runs. When Now was a student at Marquette Law School, she became actively involved in the school's Pro Bono Society and continued to take part in local running events. These days, she is a lawyer at O'Neil, Cannon, Hollman, DeJong & Laing in Milwaukee, and she participates in the firm's volunteer work with the Milwaukee Justice Center.

Combine her commitment to community service and her love of running, and you have a young lawyer who asked why Milwaukee didn't have a legal fun run to support pro bono work and to build camaraderie among those in the Milwaukee legal community. To remedy this, Now got the ball rolling to create such a run to benefit the Justice Center.

The second annual run/walk was held recently at Veterans Park on Milwaukee's lakefront. More than 150 people took part in each of the first two events, and there is potential to grow.

"I've never done anything like this," Now says. "The support's been pretty cool so far."

Now says that during her own volunteer turns at the Milwaukee Justice Center, she has helped people with everything from landlord-tenant and small claims issues to family law matters. The center, she says, "certainly fills a need in Milwaukee County." And Now is filling a need for involvement and support as the center grows.

Joshua L. Gimbel



For three generations, Josh Gimbel's family has been closely connected to Marquette University Law School. The foundation created by his grandfather, Gene Posner, L'36, has provided longtime support for the school's pro bono work; Gimbel, a lawyer with Michael Best & Friedrich, is now the president of the foundation.

So it's no surprise that Gimbel, an alum of the University of Wisconsin Law School, has been an enthusiastic supporter of the public service efforts of both Marquette Law School and the Milwaukee Justice Center. The Posner Foundation has supported both, including the work of Angela F. Schultz, Marquette Law School's pro bono coordinator, one day a week at the Justice Center. Gimbel is also involved in the Milwaukee Bar Association Foundation, and has chaired its annual golf outing, which raises money for the Justice Center.

"This was just the perfect vehicle to reach the most people," Gimbel says of the Milwaukee Justice Center. He calls it "a great marriage of need, professional attorneys, and law students." He notes one particular thing he likes is that it allows law students to see lawyers giving back to the community.

"I'm one of those people who believe you put your money where your mouth is," Gimbel says. Indeed, in addition to leading the Posner Foundation's support of pro bono work, he works about a half dozen two-hour shifts a year as a volunteer at the center.

It would be possible to adduce additional examples beyond Caldart, Hupy, Now, and Gimbel, but it is not necessary. In their support of the Milwaukee Justice Center, these four individuals, some of whose connections with Marquette Law School go back more than 75 years, are emblematic of much of what is meant with the simple but elegant term, "Marquette lawyer." ■