Volunteer Attorney: Peter Ramirez

Peter Ramirez received both his J.D and B.A. from Marquette University here in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and was admitted to practice in the State of Wisconsin in 1988. Peter Ramirez is a Shareholder in the Milwaukee office of von Briesen & Roper, s.c. He has a broad range of commercial, civil and criminal litigation experience. He assists businesses and individuals with their litigation, corporate matters, and lease negotiations. In addition, he represents individuals with will contests and trust litigation, divorce, and family law matters. He is fluent in Spanish.

How did you first get involved with the Marquette Volunteer Legal Clinic?

Julie Darnieder first contacted me after I received the Legal Action of Wisconsin Volunteer Lawyer of the Year award. I believe we spoke after the ceremony in May 2006 and she asked if I would be interested in volunteering at the MVLC. The work I have done with the MVLC has primarily been at the House of Peace and I love doing it.

Why did you choose to continue to work with the MVLC?

I continue to work with the MVLC because it gives me a tremendous sense of accomplishment. Providing pro bono services in my opinion is incumbent upon all attorneys. The MVLC at the house of peace allows me to service an important segment of our community and it also assists the students with whom I work to gain some practical experience. I have been volunteering with the MVLC for over seven years and I look forward to continuing my work there.

Has your work at the MVLC been of any assistance to you professionally?

Yes, it has allowed me to delve into areas of the law with which I am not accustomed to practicing. Volunteering there gives me a sense of fulfillment as an attorney because I also get to help the law students develop skills when they conduct the initial client meeting. When I worked at a smaller firm, I was never as involved as I would’ve liked to have been with the MVLC. Now that I’m at a bigger firm, I know I can leave and have backup at the office if necessary. At a larger firm, it is customary to work with entities and institutions, and at the MVLC I am able to work with individual clients who have real life problems they need to address and it makes my work very meaningful.

What advice would you give to students in law school?

First, get involved in volunteer legal programs. Second, get involved in as many of the clinics and internships as possible – the prosecutor and public defender clinics are very helpful because you receive hands on court room training. You do not need to be interested in litigation. Additionally, if you are able, get involved in the service industry; it is a great way to meet people in your community and develop a network and potential client base for when you become a lawyer. Another way to meet people is through attendance at legal functions and meetings including CLE conferences. These events are either free or
What do you wish someone had told you about entering the law profession after getting your JD?
I wish someone would have told me to get on the boards of organizations and volunteer for nonprofit organizations; these are other good ways to establish a client base. Another thing I wish someone would have explained to me is the sociological and psychological dynamics of human beings. That is not something you learn in law school and it is an important thing to learn for interacting with clients. The third thing I wish I would have learned in law school was how to administer an office. It is a time consuming aspect of being an attorney running your own office and if it is not run efficiently, it takes away from your practice of law. It took me awhile to learn how to wear both administrator and lawyer hats. You need to learn how to strike a balance between the two. Fourth, I wish someone would have received more training on how to not be afraid to ask a potential client for a retainer. It can be an awkward conversation because it takes practice to recognize how long it will take you to resolve a matter so that you can gauge the fees you will charge a client.

Why is it important for lawyers to do pro bono work?
It is important to do pro bono work because there are many individuals in our community who do not have access to legal assistance. Our job as attorneys is to competently assist people and companies with their legal problems. Not everyone has the resources to hire counsel. The Marquette Volunteer Legal Clinic is a great way to do pro bono work with the individuals who don’t usually have access or resources to obtain legal assistance.

Do you have any hobbies outside of your job as a lawyer to keep a balanced life?
I am into playing sports. I also love to cook. I learned how to cook watching my mother I enjoy making all sorts of tacos. Someday I would like to retire in a beach community on the Pacific side of Mexico and set up a stand to sell tacos to the locals and the tourists. Additionally, my brother and I have talked about opening up a bar in the area. Both are exciting to think about and plan.