

“Salus Populi Suprema Lex”
The Welfare of the People

Alumni receive assistance for living the Law School mission

As a staff attorney with Neighborhood Legal Services in Pittsburgh, **Nicole Scialabba** spends her days working to ensure that the poor have access to legal counsel. In the wake of the recent recession, the assistance she has provided to people facing foreclosure, eviction and a lack of affordable health care has been more valuable than ever.



Nicole Scialabba

As important as her work may be, however, the pay is modest, especially when weighed against the burden of her student loan debt. The burden can be such, in fact, that many attorneys like Scialabba eventually are forced to forego careers serving the public interest.

But a new endowment is giving Duquesne School of Law graduates a chance to continue doing the work they love. The William B. Billock Loan Repayment Assistance Program provides help to Duquesne grads such as Scialabba, whose jobs allow them to further Duquesne’s mission of service.

“Without loan repayment assistance program opportunities like Duquesne offers, I would not be able to afford working at Neighborhood Legal Services Association,” said Scialabba, a 2006 grad. “LRAP definitely allows me to be able to continue working at a job that I love.”

The endowment was established in 2008, and 14 Duquesne School of Law graduates represent the first group to benefit. **Kirsha Weyandt** is grateful to be part of that group.

“Receiving the loan repayment assistance from Duquesne has been immensely helpful,” said Weyandt, who is an associate in the Allegheny County Office of Conflict Counsel. The 2006 graduate pays about \$900 a month toward her law school debt.

Matthew Rogers, a 2008 graduate, likewise is burdened with formidable debt; he pays about \$750 a month. “This is one of the most valuable financial assistance programs I have ever encountered,” said Rogers, a judicial law clerk in Washington County. “While I expect my law degree will pay for itself tomorrow, lending institutions still expect their payments today.”

Jessica Roberts is a Washington County law clerk, as well, in addition to working as a Protection From Abuse coordinator. “I enjoy assisting people when they are facing a difficult situation and, hopefully, giving the parties comfort. I feel I that I am able to be a voice for those who are often not heard,” the 2006 grad said.

According to Associate Dean Nancy Perkins, applicants for the loan repayment assistance must meet three criteria: 1) employment in a qualifying public interest law position 2) a maximum of \$45,000 in adjusted gross income and 3) outstanding law school debt. Perkins



is the Highest Law.

— Cicero

said the maximum amount an applicant can receive at this time is \$5,000 a year.

Genylynn Cosgrove, assistant prosecutor in Lancaster, Ohio, said that the most gratifying part of her job is having “a chance to help people, whether it is a victim in a domestic violence case or a defendant who is trying to get a valid driver’s license.” However, the expenses the expectant mother and her husband soon will face compelled her to consider seeking a job in the private sector.



Genylynn Cosgrove

“When I learned that I would receive the loan repayment assistance, I realized that I could probably afford to continue working at the job I love,” said Cosgrove, who graduated in 2004.



Mariah Balling-Peck

As guardian *ad litem* for displaced children in Fayette County, **Mariah Balling-Peck** advocates for kids during custody disputes. The 2003 grad considers such service-oriented law her “calling.”

“The LRAP softens the blow of the financial hardship this type of work causes, because it is time consuming, stressful and demanding,” Balling-Peck said.

Nevertheless, she said being a voice for kids has its own rewards.

“I get something a lot of attorneys don’t get — hugs from precious little children.”

Like her fellow alumni, **Nicole Wetherton** appreciates the assistance from the Billock Program. “This program allows the public interest sector to keep many qualified employees who otherwise would have to leave a career that they enjoy,” said Wetherton, a 2006 Duquesne grad who works in the Allegheny County District Attorney’s Office.

Matthew Kopecki, who graduated in 2008, is a law clerk with the Berks County Court of Common Pleas. He said that LRAP has helped him stem the tide from debt incurred during his move to Reading.

“LRAP made it possible for me to continue in my position. The job market for lawyers is pretty tough right now, and I count myself lucky to be employed,” he said. “However ... I was forced to incur a significant amount of credit card debt when I moved here. The LRAP money allowed me to pay off this debt and focus more of my funds on my student loans. I am very thankful for the grant, and hope to return the favor when I am in a position to do so,” Kopecki said.

Perhaps no LRAP recipient personifies Duquesne’s commitment to social justice, though, more than the **Rev. Ernie Poland Jr.** In addition to serving as pastor of Keyser Presbyterian Church in Keyser, W.Va., Poland operates Justice For All Legal Services, which provides counsel to people who otherwise couldn’t afford it.



Rev. Ernie Poland Jr.

The seemingly disparate nature of those jobs has given some a new perspective about the legal profession.

“Clients have expressed their gratitude and, at times, bewilderment considering the dual nature of my calling to help my fellow human

beings,” said Poland, who graduated in 2005. He said that he would not be able to fulfill both callings were it not for the loan repayment assistance program.

“Since I do not attract clients who can afford legal services, the expenses of operating an office space on Main Street were forcing me to decide between two noble vocations,” Poland said. “This was not a decision I felt comfortable making, yet the bottom line was about to dictate my future. This program literally rescued me from closing my law office and forsaking my law school training.”

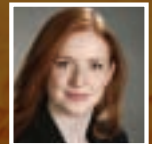
The loan repayment assistance program is named for the late William B. Billock, a 1938 law school graduate who served as vice president of Gulf Oil and represented the company as head of industrial relations. The \$1.4 million endowment that bears his name is meant to encourage pursuit of careers in nonprofit public interest law or in local, state or federal government. ♣

Among the first 14 recipients of assistance from the William B. Billock Loan Repayment Assistance Program are these Duquesne School of Law alumni:

- **Mariah Balling-Peck**, guardian *ad litem* for displaced children, Fayette County Children and Youth Services, 2003
- **Julie Brennan**, judicial law clerk, Butler County, 2009
- **Courtney Butterfield**, assistant district attorney, Allegheny County, 2007
- **Genylynn Marie Cosgrove**, prosecutor, Lancaster, Ohio, 2004
- **Hope Guy**, attorney, KidsVoice, 2003
- **Matthew Kopecki**, judicial law clerk, Berks County, 2008
- **The Rev. Ernie Poland Jr.**, pastor, Keyser Presbyterian Church, Keyser, W.Va., and operator of Justice For All Legal Services, 2005
- **Jessica Sue Roberts**, senior judicial law clerk and Protection From Abuse coordinator, Washington County, 2006
- **Matthew Rogers**, judicial law clerk, Washington County, 2008
- **Nicole Scialabba**, attorney, Neighborhood Legal Services, 2006
- **Nicole Thomas-Wetherton**, assistant district attorney, Allegheny County, 2006
- **Kirsha Weyandt**, associate counsel, Allegheny County Office of Conflict Counsel, 2006



Julie Brennan



Hope Guy

Applications for the next round of funding are due by September 1, 2010, and are available on the law school’s Web site: www.duq.edu/law/alumni.