

SMRLS e-News!

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(We welcome your feedback!)

Meet SMRLS New CEO: Jessie Nicholson



Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services

www.smrls.org

Distributed to the SMRLS Board and Staff throughout Southern Minnesota and North Dakota

Welcome to the first publication of **SMRLS e-News!** The mission of e-News! is to provide a quick-read of SMRLS staff announcements, department information, Minnesota law and litigation watches, and upcoming events. If you tell us that you find the information informative, we'll keep publishing SMRLS e-News! Please provide your comments and suggestions to betty.passick@smrls.org. We apologize for any oversight of any other important events or comings-and-goings that were missed in this edition (we can send a supplemental e-News!, if needed). In the future, watch for a "Call for News Items" email to be sent two weeks prior to each publication of upcoming issues of e-News! Length and content of all submissions may be edited to fit the e-newsletter's mission and space.

Jessie Nicholson has assumed the role of Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS) chief executive officer effective August 1. She is uniquely qualified for her new position after dedicating over 22 years in various leadership positions at SMRLS.

Jessie grew up the middle child of seven in Waterloo, Iowa. Both of her parents emphasized the value of education and the importance of a strong work ethic. Jessie earned a bachelor's degree in sociology and a master's degree in Spanish from the University of Northern Iowa, where she subsequently taught Spanish. Relocating to Minnesota in the late '70s, Jessie began law school at William Mitchell. During her years at Mitchell, Jessie was reminded of a message frequently delivered by one of her role models, an African American jurist, Judge William Parker. His message of a life of service and giving back to the community resonated with Jessie and helped shape the type of law she wanted to practice. Upon graduation from law school, Jessie accepted a position with SMRLS and thus began what was to become a life-long passion for serving others. Most recently she served as senior leadership attorney for SMRLS' Refugee, Immigrant and Migrant Services practice group.

The landscape of legal services has changed dramatically over the years. Immigration law has become a major focus as Jessie's clients face many challenges compounded by language and cultural differences. Jessie said, "SMRLS is a vibrant, exciting place to work with people who fight discrimination, protect civil rights, and meet the varied needs of their clients."

Sally Scoggin, long time SMRLS Board member and chair of the Supreme Court statewide planning effort for legal services, says "I have observed Jessie in the role of senior leader at SMRLS for many years. She is a knowledgeable, skilled leader with a deep understanding of the organization and its mission. I know her to be a compassionate advocate and a warm and wonderful person."

To keep balance in her life, Jessie exercises, gardens, and sings in her church choir. Jessie's faith is a large part of who she is. Traveling often to Italy, she carves a part of each trip for a reflective time at the monastery, Santuarium della Verna, in Tuscany. She can converse with the monks in their native tongue and finds the solitude energizing.

Jessie and her husband, Charles, have been married 35 years and have one son, who is a junior at St Thomas.

Jessie Nicholson will bring unique vision, skills, and leadership to her new role at SMRLS as she provides the highest level of service to Minnesotans in need.

Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality.

Bruce Beneke Appreciation Picnic!



Minnesota Law And Litigation Watches

Staff Announcements



Bill Tilton (rear) hosted a SMRLS farewell luncheon for Barbara Penn (left) and her professional associate, Gayla Ellis, on August 6 at the law firm of Tilton & Dunn in St. Paul. Barbara and Gayla will be departing SMRLS effective August 31. Also pictured is Ken Tilsen (right), a previous counsel at the Tilton & Dunn law firm.

Mark your calendar and plan to attend the "THE SMRLS AND ITS 'EQUAL JUSTICE SUPPORTERS' BRUCE BENEKE APPRECIATION PICNIC" on September 15, 2007 from 1-4:00 p.m. at Harriet Island in St. Paul. Join Bruce in celebrating 30 years of service as executive director of SMRLS. The festivities include great food catered by Famous Dave's and music provided by Grant West. We've planned face-painting and super jumps for children. And what picnic is complete without root beer floats? Please RSVP the **number of adults and children** from your family that will attend by **September 3** to betty.passick@smrls.org.



See you September 15!

(print "Bruce Beneke Picnic" Flyer...see .pdf attachment to SMRLS e-News!)

JaPaul Harris, staff attorney in St. Paul for the Housing Equality Law Project, made an oral argument to the Court of Appeals on July 18. This case involves review of a decision by the Dakota County CDA and its informal hearing officer to terminate the Section 8 voucher of a SMRLS client for allegedly failing to report that her niece and her niece's infant child were staying with her. Issues presented in this case include whether the client made a good faith effort to report that her niece was living with her and whether the CDA should have taken into consideration mitigating circumstances before terminating her rental assistance.

Lisa Hollingsworth, senior attorney in St. Paul for Housing, filed an appeal on behalf of a client when the Dakota County CDA terminated his Section 8 voucher assistance. The termination was based upon alleged criminal activity. The client was neither charged nor arrested for criminal activity. The CDA's termination did not specify the crime nor the elements of the crime, which was the basis for the termination. The alleged crime took place over a year prior to the termination hearing. Lisa argued the case before the Minnesota Court of Appeals on July 17.

(to read the complete announcement...see .pdf attachment to SMRLS e-News!)

Ryan Briese has been hired as benefits attorney in Mankato effective August 1. Ryan is 2007 graduate of William Mitchell College of Law....

Kandice Cooke has submitted her resignation effective August 10, concluding her one year VISTA commitment to SMRLS, to take another VISTA position in West Virginia.

Lindsay Efting has resigned effective the end of July. She has been a great addition to the Worthington office and the SW Family/Housing Unit, and...

Dan Gislason, a long-time SMRLS volunteer and booster, has won the 2007 Fifth Judicial District Pro Bono Award after being jointly nominated by SMRLS...

Lora Hopp started a Family/Housing position in Worthington on August 6. Lora is a 2007 graduate of Drake University Law School. She worked as a student ...

Andrea Jepsen began working with SMRLS in August 2006 as a contract attorney, working in the Senior Law project. In August 2007, Andrea became a staff...

Katie Kneissel has become staff attorney in the Winona Office specializing in Family and Housing Law. She is a 2007 graduate of Hamline University School...

Crysta Parkin has become a staff attorney in our Rochester office specializing in Family and Housing Law. Crysta is a 2007 graduate of Hamline University...

Betty Brandt Passick has joined SMRLS in St. Paul as a contract worker to provide administrative/ campaign support, and will be assisting Kathie Battle Sayles...

Ana Pena's position has been renewed following LSAC's extension of the funding for the Southwest Immigrant Refugee Access Project for another two years...

Barbara Penn, coordinator for SMRLS Campaign for Legal Aid (CLA), and Barbara's professional associate, **Gayla Ellis**, will be departing SMRLS effective ...

Kathie Battle Sayles will become Campaign for Legal Aid leader effective August 31. Kathie has extensive fundraising and project management experience....

Tom Zera is in the process of being hired as our VISTA for the Housing Repair project (rural HALO). Tom was our Spring semester Gustavus Adolphus College...