

Attorney rules in favor of teaching

By Val Van Meter
The Winchester Star

WINCHESTER — Nancy Glickman is off on an adventure — trading the courtroom for a classroom.

For 27 years, the Blue Ridge Legal Services attorney has fulfilled the prediction of her high school yearbook: “future lawyer.”

But this week, she leaves law to enter the field of education.

As a single mother with two children, Glickman could have used her law degree in more lucrative ways. But as a “child of the ‘60s,” the New York native was focused on helping others.

Her children accepted Payless shoes instead of Birkenstocks so their mom could be a do-gooder, she said.

Glickman survived the economic burden of having two children in college at the same time during the past year — her son Nikolai von Keller graduated with a major in government, while her daughter Travis Rose von Keller entered college in North Carolina.

She feels now is the time to change careers.

“They are both supportive of my adventure. It’s pretty weird, what I’m doing,” she said. “I really enjoy teaching.”

This fall will find Glickman teaching high school social studies in New Orleans. “I’ve come to believe that for my clients, the way to get out of poverty is based on education.”

The legal assistance she has provided — locally for the past 18 years and before that in Georgia, Indiana, and North Carolina — is most often reactive. “To try to change that path, education is extremely important.”

And New Orleans desperately needs teachers.

Her ties to the area, through friends of her parents, are pushing her to help. "I've been a visitor there for years and years."

The devastation to parts of the city, caused by floodwaters when the levees broke during Hurricane Katrina, has also moved Glickman deeply.

The new job is teaching and helping people: "It's a place I like, but it's not the easy way out."

Glickman is part of "teachNOLA," which is seeking people with and without teaching certificates to work in the Recovery School District or charter schools in New Orleans.

Since she is not certified, Glickman must also study this summer and fall to earn her teaching certificate, even as she teaches in the schools.

But she's been guaranteed a berth on the high school level.

"I think that's where I'm best equipped, where my expertise lies."

Her career path

Glickman's career started with an initiative to provide free legal services in the 1970s.

President Johnson proposed and President Nixon signed legislation in the '70s to create the Legal Services Corporation, which, in turn, was to fund legal counsel for the poor. The theory was that a low-income person deserved as good a lawyer as a rich person.

"It was a weapon in the 'War on Poverty,'" said Glickman, who attended a public-interest law school, Antioch, in Washington, D.C. "You don't hear much about that war anymore, but I know, in my heart, it wasn't won."

The system went into effect in 1974. When Glickman started law school a year later, the goal was to have one public defender for each 5,000 poor people.

The states set up different types of systems, but all had to seek funding from the Legal Services Corporation.

Under President Reagan, that funding was cut, Glickman said, forcing the legal aid groups to seek grants and other monies to continue to provide services.

In some places, states provide some funding; in other places, local United Way organizations

help. But, Glickman said, no matter where the money comes from, and despite the fact that the Blue Ridge Legal Services is a corporation with a board of directors, it must meet federal criteria for using the money.

In addition to handling cases as a public defender, Glickman had always made teaching a part of her life.

She started out conducting training and teaching for new legal aid attorneys. Later, she moved to giving seminars at the state and national level.

She has taught paralegal studies at Lord Fairfax Community College in Middletown for many years.

Her years in law

Looking back on her 37 years in the legal aid field, Glickman said she feels some strides have been made.

"In some respects, we're doing a better job," she said, but added that, since the idea of legal help for the poor was initiated, many more restrictions have been placed on the service.

A good thing, Glickman said, is that the role of the public defender has become "institutionalized" as an accepted member of the legal community."

However, she can't help feeling that accepting legal aid for the poor is also accepting poverty.

Glickman is winding up the cases she has been handling for Blue Ridge Legal Services.

Her last day at work is Tuesday, and shortly after dawn on the next day, she will take a flight for New Orleans.

"It's time for me to move on," she said, noting that she has lived in Winchester longer than anywhere else in her life. "It's a good place to raise children.

"I think I'm still effecting some good," Glickman said. "It's just in a different way in a different place."

'She's kept us honest'

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WINCHESTER — While Nancy J. Glickman is leaving Blue Ridge Legal Services and moving to New Orleans, her influence will continue to be felt here.

"She is a dynamite lady," said local lawyer Bruce Downing.

As president of the Community Fund, Downing said he and its board have set up a new fund — the Nancy J. Glickman Fund for Blue Ridge Legal Aid — that will solicit donations and make grants to the organization, which provides legal services for the poor.

"We've got \$2,000 in donations and pledges in just a week," Downing said.

The contributions reflect the high regard the legal community has for Glickman, he said.

"She's kept us honest for 18 years," Downing joked, noting she is an expert on the legalities of landlord-tenant relations.

"I used to tease her that I represented the 'dark side' — landlords," he added. "She's protected people. She's worked hard. And we've had a good relationship with her because of her integrity."

In fact, Downing said, many members of the local bar association did pro bono work for Blue Ridge clients because of their respect for Glickman.

"I can't say enough good things about her," said Mary Daniel, a lawyer who serves on the Advisory Board of Blue Ridge Legal Services. She is also a member of the Virginia Women's Bar Association.

"When I first came back here in 1996 ... I was told I needed to meet Nancy Glickman," Daniel said. The reason was that Glickman was considered the most knowledgeable lawyer in the state on debtor-creditor law.

"They were right," Daniel said.

Glickman won the Virginia State Bar's 2004 Legal Aid Award, as the best in the state.

Her boss, John E. Whitfield, nominated her in a letter, describing her as "a great attorney and litigator, a great trainer, a great manager, a great mentor, a great community servant, and a great leader."

"She was the literal answer to my prayers," Whitfield wrote in 1989, when he advertised for a managing attorney for the "financially strapped, struggling" Winchester legal services office.

By 2004, Glickman had personally assisted more than 3,900 clients, while supervising an office that worked with 13,700 clients.

Whitfield praised Glickman as a truly impressive litigator. At that time, Glickman had a win rate of over 85 percent, he said. "And, of the remaining 15 percent, she could claim partial victory in over half of them."

Her wins have been felt by many beyond her own clients, Whitfield wrote, including the following areas:

Subsidized housing tenants can't be evicted for late payment, if they tender the rent within three days of receiving their public assistance check.

College financial aid can't be used to reduce or exclude mothers from food stamps.

All legal notices and notes must be in place before default judgements can be made.

"There is this mind set," said Blue Ridge Legal Services staff attorney Jennifer Locke, "that an attorney you get for free can't possibly be as good as one of those high-priced attorneys. Seeing her skills in a courtroom, you know that is most definitely not the case. There's nothing she can't do."

Legal aid services was not just a job for Glickman, Daniel said. "It's a philosophy, it's a lifestyle. It's almost a religion. She represented people who otherwise might not have a voice."

Glickman has also been a mentor to young lawyers.

"You always learn something from Nancy, whether it's on the other end of a phone or the other side of the aisle. She's brilliant, competent, and well-prepared," Daniel said, "And she doesn't waste people's time. That's a big compliment to give a lawyer."

Daniel said Glickman's work to get low-income clients the benefits they are entitled to has been a boon to the economy of the area — something many people overlook. And she has been instrumental in training new staffers at Blue Ridge Legal Services. "That's her greatest legacy."

"She's a straight shooter," Downing said. "She raised the quality of our bar."