

PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

RALPH J. LAMPARELLO

Celebrating the New Jersey Lawyer



I am going to tell you my story—which is going to be about you, about us, and who we are—for we are New Jersey lawyers. Yes, we are sworn officers of the Court, and that means we have a moral imperative to improve the system each day. But, as New Jersey lawyers, we do that and so much more. I have never encountered a group of people, indeed an entire profession, who contribute so much. Who dedicate themselves, not just to improving the system of justice and practice of law, but to improving their communities and the lives of those around them. A lot of people talk the talk, but no one walks the walk like a New Jersey lawyer. You are the people I want to celebrate in the year ahead.

(Editor's Note: This column is an excerpt from New Jersey State Bar Association President Ralph J. Lamparello's speech delivered during his installation on May 17 at the NJSBA Annual Meeting and Convention in Atlantic City.)

There is hardly a lawyer in this state who doesn't have a powerful and inspiring story about the path he or she traveled to the law. So many of us are the children of immigrants. A great many of us are just one or two generations from another land. We worked night jobs—or two or three—to get through school. We come from every walk of life, every socio-economic strata, every background, and every faith. New Jersey is the most diverse state in the United States, and New Jersey lawyers reflect the beauty of that diversity. One needs to look no further than the American Bar Association. Karol Corbin Walker, our sister and past president, is now serving as the president of the National Conference of Bar Presidents. She is the first African-American woman to lead that organization. And in 2015, our own Paulette Brown is the uncontested nominee for president of the American Bar Association. Not only will she be the first New Jersey lawyer in 50 years to be president, she is the also

the first woman of color to ever lead the ABA in its 135 years of existence. Congratulations to both of them. Karol and Paulette are New Jersey lawyers.

So you can see what my story is about—it's about New Jersey lawyers.

When I talk to you about Neil Mullin, you immediately recognize his name as one of the pre-eminent employment lawyers in the state of New Jersey. But I'm not going to talk to you about all of the victims of discrimination that he and his wife, Nancy, our new NJSBA trustee, have represented, and in doing so created and continue to create new law. Instead, I'm going to tell you about how this former cab driver from the Bronx spent 18 years of his life working *pro bono* and spending his own money to vindicate and ultimately free a man wrongly convicted and imprisoned for murder. Neil would never accept defeat, because his heart knew the truth. The case resulted in 22 reported decisions, two *habeas corpus* petitions, an *ex parte* federal court order seizing the files of the police and prosecutors, Freedom of Information Act litigation, and an appeal and unanimous opinion of the United States Supreme Court, which led to the exoneration of Neil's client. But that wasn't the end of the matter for Neil. Upon release from prison, his client worked at Neil and Nancy's law firm as

a paralegal, and lived 13 happy years as a free man because of Neil's passion, persistence and belief in his innocence. Neil is a New Jersey lawyer. We salute him.

In December 2004, Bruce Goldstein, one of New Jersey's best-known litigators who has just been recognized by the *New Jersey Law Journal* as the Litigator of the Year in this state, suffered a heart attack. Most of his left ventricle had been damaged and doctors discovered all of his coronary arteries were blocked. Bruce was told there was nothing that could be done for him—he would die without a heart transplant. On June 29, 2005, Bruce received the ultimate gift of life, a miracle new heart, and he joins us tonight, renewed, restored and wiser. But that isn't the end of Bruce's story. With a strong commitment to do everything he could to promote organ donation, Bruce now serves as vice chair of the New Jersey Organ and Tissue Sharing Network. His work on behalf of the Sharing Network is passionate and personal. On a daily basis, he assists others in receiving a second chance. Bruce is a New Jersey lawyer.

Many of you know Michael Ferrara as a skilled litigator from Cherry Hill. What I want you to know about is what you don't see in court. Mike served his country as a naval officer and is a veteran of the Vietnam conflict. When Communism imploded in the former USSR, Mike traveled throughout Russia teaching the people of that newly democratic country what was for them a novel concept—home ownership, a stake in their future that could be passed on to their children. But that's not enough. Mike serves on the board of Amigos de Jesus, a home for impoverished children in Honduras, a safe haven for children who do not have a family of their own. Mike is a New Jersey lawyer.

When a devastating earthquake struck Haiti, leaving a million people homeless and upwards of 230,000 dead,

Shana Fried, a senior associate at Reed Smith, led a team of lawyers and paralegals from the firm to help women and children subjected to horrific violence in the aftermath. Shana and her colleagues are working with a grandmother, daughter and five-year-old granddaughter, all of whom had been raped, to get them temporary assistance in the United States. Through humanitarian parole applications, they expect to soon bring them to our great country and ensure a network of services will be available for medical, psychological and social assistance. Shana is a New Jersey lawyer.

Joe Walsh is a successful plaintiff's attorney from Voorhees. But, more importantly, he created a free athletic program to help special needs kids play ball. Through the DelRan Special Needs Athletics league, more than 45 children play baseball and more than 110 take part in bowling. Joe Walsh is a New Jersey lawyer.

When Hurricane Sandy devastated our state, New Jersey lawyers stepped forward and provided assistance to so many who had lost so much. More than 250 lawyers from our bar association stepped forward to assist victims on a *pro bono* basis, regardless of income, and with no promise of anything in return. Their work continues today. Their response was so rapid and their results so extraordinary that FEMA gave out the phone number of the New Jersey State Bar Association to those in need, and we assisted over 50 families a day for weeks on end. Who are these lawyers? They are you and me. People like Jay Bernstein, who has volunteered for the NJSBA Mass Disaster Program for many years, and Bill Kraiss, Stephen Barry, Beth White, Domenick Carmagnola and Shivani Malik. Shivani had a background in landlord/tenant work and took over 45 referrals from Sandy victims to provide them with guidance as to their rights under the law. Jay, Bill,

Stephen, Beth, Domenick and Shivani are all New Jersey lawyers.

When our New Jersey soldiers went to Iraq and Afghanistan, to fight for our very freedom, and when they came back from the horrors of war, New Jersey lawyers were there to assist them. The lawyers in our Military Legal Assistance Program still represent them today. Let me take a moment to tell you about General Bill Greenberg, who was just sworn in as a judge to the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims; Michael Pasquale and Robert Towey, who helped many service people with medical and disability appeals; George Hanley, who helped with employment matters; and Barbara Ulrichsen, David Esposito and Joan Crowley, who all provided much-needed assistance in family law to our soldiers. They are all New Jersey lawyers.

I think, by now, you understand my story. In the year ahead, as I have the great privilege of serving the New Jersey State Bar Association and our members as president, I plan to tell people across this state about New Jersey lawyers.

My message to them is that when people are in distress, they can count on a New Jersey lawyer. It's that when people need help, they can count on a New Jersey lawyer. When people are down, they can count on a New Jersey lawyer to help pick them up.

So, I want you to remember one thing about this message, and I hope you'll remember it in years to come. Feel good about who you are—a New Jersey lawyer. Go back to your communities, walk a little taller, hold your heads a little higher and make that smile on your face a little broader knowing all the time who you are—a New Jersey lawyer. I'm a New Jersey lawyer and I'm damn proud of it. Thank you. ☺