

# Volunteer Venue

The value of a volunteer hour according to the Independent Sector: \$17.55.  
The value of a volunteer hour to LCBH: priceless.

## The AOD Experience from LCBH's AOD Volunteer of the Year

# Louis DiSanto

*The following is Louis DiSanto's acceptance speech from the 2006 annual reception and awards ceremony; his words and story were very inspiring so we had to share.*

I can't express how much I appreciate that LCBH thought of me for this award. I remember thinking how great it was for Tony to win this last year, how



Louis DiSanto

proud the firm was of him, and now for me to be standing here, ... it's simply humbling and I am very, very grateful.

That being said, it is certainly no surprise that a first year associate does not earn an award like this without a lot of help. And I had a lot of help. It takes the guidance and patience of thoughtful people to help an otherwise walking malpractice liability, like myself, to do constructive things. Every time I look at this award, I will think of these people.

Above all, I will think of Ms. Sheri Wilson and Mr. Hearer Caldwell. They're the darling couple we represented in the case where we got the big judgment. I would like to briefly tell you their story. Some of us might remember the unusually cold week in November of last year, 2005, it ended up being one of the coldest weeks of the season, with several consecutive

### Interested in becoming an AOD Volunteer?

Attorney of the Day (AOD) Program Volunteers represent low-income tenants in eviction court. Volunteers can choose to either handle an entire case from intake through settlement or volunteer in the courtroom one or more mornings a month.

Interested volunteers please contact  
Christine Kellogg, J.D at (312) 347-7600 ext. 24,  
or send an email to [ckellogg@lcbh.org](mailto:ckellogg@lcbh.org).

night-time lows in the single digits. On one of these days, Ms. Wilson, a home-maker, and Mr. Caldwell, a pastor, we're at the hospital visiting a sick aunt, when they got a phone call from their teenage son. They're home, for which they had a valid lease, had been boarded up, and he couldn't get in. The police tried to help, but advised them to get a court order.

For two days, Ms. Wilson and Mr. Caldwell tried on their own to navigate the court system, and as one might expect, ran into several obstacles. For these two days, the family lived out of their car, in that bitterly cold weather, with not much more than the clothes on their backs. Thankfully, they were referred by the judge to LCBH, and Mr. Stephen McKenzie and Ms. Cecilia Abundis, got them the order they needed right away.

When Ms. Wilson and Mr. Caldwell brought the order to their home, with the police, they found their belongings in the alley way. Destroyed, scavenged, rained on, or missing entirely. They lost everything. They had a portable grill that they would use to sell hotdogs and burgers at Sox games and city events—gone. The son's school materials and books -

*continued inside ...*

## Client Success

"Nancy", a senior in our community who shares her home with nine of her grand and great-grandchildren, came to LCBH when she was being threatened by her landlord with eviction. The landlord had been unjustly and wrongly compelling her to pay for the utility bills that were his responsibility. He also had not made repairs to the house that were needed based on a Section 8 inspection that the house failed. Nancy is a mother of nine children of her own, who has lost five of them to cancer and other illnesses. She has also lost two of her grandsons.

The services we offered were two-fold: LCBH attorney William Moore represented her in court and was able to get a \$6,000 settlement from the landlord, while Case Manager Paul Beals, worked with Nancy in getting CHAC to speed up their inspection and make sure she got her moving papers efficiently and promptly. With her settlement, Nancy was able to move out of a substandard dwelling and in to a seven bedroom house. Though she and her "kids" still face many, many challenges, it was our privilege to be able to walk alongside Nancy and work with her to get her family into a safe, decent and stable place to live. ■

### Giving to LCBH

For information on donating to LCBH, the Pension Protection Act that contains a number of charitable giving incentives, or the return on your gift, please contact: Erin Bauer, (312) 347-7600 x25, [ebauer@lcbh.org](mailto:ebauer@lcbh.org)

**Lawyers' Committee for Better Housing**  
220 S. State St., Suite 1700  
Chicago, IL 60604



# Housing Briefs

Fall/Winter 2006  
Publication of Lawyers' Committee for Better Housing

## Needs New Headline\*\*

Unscrupulous owners are utilizing a variety of tactics to avoid the requirements put in place to protect tenants. The Chicago Condominium Ordinance requires developers to give notice to tenants 120 days prior to recording a declaration of intent to convert, yet many owners are vacating their buildings with improper 30-day notices, then recording their declaration.

Some owners renovate multi-family buildings while tenants are still in their lease periods, creating hazardous and dangerous, unlivable conditions - constructive eviction without proper legal process. Although tenants must be given the right of first refusal to purchase their rental unit, that right is lost when a building is emptied out prematurely and/or improperly.

The tenants in our Better Housing Action Network have identified condo conversion as a major concern. Across the country, a variety of protections are in place to protect tenants in buildings that are targeted for condo conversion. Many of these protections provide tenants with more rights than are available to tenants in Chicago, which is in the top ten in the country in number of condo conversions.

With displacement from affordable rental housing at an all-time high, there is urgency to providing additional provisions to protect tenants. An estimated 4,000 apartments in Chicago, most of them affordable for low and moderate-income tenants, were converted into condos in 2005, a 400% increase from 1990.

LCBH is working with other housing advocates to urge the City to close loopholes in the existing law and to provide more

*As the condo conversion craze continues to dominate Chicago's real estate market, little attention has been paid to the families, usually low and moderate-income, who are being displaced by devious means.*

complete protection for tenants whose buildings are targeted for conversion. Other jurisdictions across the country provide additional protections for seniors and the disabled, relocation assistance for all displaced

tenants, and a retroactive enforcement mechanism. With some safeguards for existing tenants in place, Chicago must do more to protect families who are in the unfortunate position of living in a building targeted for conversion.

*(See "The Illinois Condominium Property Act and the Stealth Conversion Problem: A Comparative Analysis of Tenant Protections in the Nation's Top 20 Conversion Markets," by Kathryn Richard, Housing Policy Intern, at [www.lcbb.org](http://www.lcbb.org).)*

**- Kathleen K. Clark  
Executive Director**

### SAVE THE DATE!

**WHO:** All are welcome to the hearts tournament, hearts aficionado or not!

**WHAT:** Hearts for Housing

**WHERE:** Union League Club of Chicago,  
65 West Jackson Blvd., Chicago

**WHEN:** Friday, February 9th at 5:30 pm

**WHY:** To enjoy an evening of card games, food, drinks, and fun to support affordable housing in Chicago, and for the chance to win great prizes!

## The AOD Experience from Louis DiSanto *continued ...*

gone. Ms. Wilson's family pictures and heirloom furniture—gone. Mr. Caldwell's antique record collection of Jazz greats, Johnny Coltrane, Sweets Edison, Buddy Tate—gone. They lost everything

Without their home or belongings, the family was forced to rely on the generosity of friends and family to put things back together. Sometimes, having to live apart from one another. Shortly thereafter, LCBH asked Tony to get involved, and he accepted. I agreed to help.

When we met Ms. Wilson and Mr. Caldwell they were justifiably angry. As anyone in their position would be. Their landlord, this criminal, took everything they had, and placed everything that they were ever going to have, including their health and family unity, at risk. It is what Mr. Caldwell and Ms. Wilson did from this point on that amazes me, and this is what I will never forget. They listened to Tony tell them that we were going to help, that we were going to help the court make things right, but that it was going to take time, and we would need their help.

Throughout the entire year that we've been working on their case

we never lost their patience or their complete cooperation. They put their trust in total strangers, put their faith in the court, and showed patience with the justice system. Without that, we would not be here today. We wouldn't be here with a seventy thousand dollar judgment hanging over this criminal's head.

Next I have to thank the LCBH team. Especially, Mr. Gerard O'Toole, William Moore, and Cecilia Abundis. Without them, almost none of this great work would get done.

And finally, I have to thank the Wildman team. My colleague, Ms. Amanda Berndt, just got a big judgment in favor of an LCBH client that included attorneys' fees. All the partners in the room just shifted in their seats when I said attorneys' fees. So, you see, more that just good community service can come out of doing this LCBH work.

But that's what this is all about. It's about providing legal service to those that otherwise can't afford it. Because doing so, ensures that they are treated fairly and helps us make our entire society and better and safer place to live. ■

## Congratulations to the 2006 LCBH Marathon Team

Thanks to our first team for a great run in the 2006 LaSalle Bank Chicago Marathon on behalf of the Lawyers' Committee for Better Housing. All three members had great runs and no injuries. And a special thanks to all of you who were able to so generously support their commitment.

### Here is a brief rundown on their outstanding efforts in support of better housing:

**Lisa Bauer.** Personal best run at 3:33:43 and a qualifying time for Boston.

She finished 4,964 overall, 830 among women runners and 235 in her division (women 25-30).

**Vanessa Lesniak.** Personal best run at 3:37:58 and a qualifying time for Boston.

She finished 5,764 overall, 1,094 among women runners and 203 in her division (women 30-35). Plans to run the Boston Marathon for the second time.

**Rebecca Schmedlin.** A gutsy run of 3:42:46 after having just returned from a European business trip and while still recovering from injury. She finished 6,847 overall, 1,476 among women runners and 296 in her division (women 30-35).



Alex Polikoff

Photograph by Al DiFranco

# Annual Reception and Awards Ceremony 2006 Highlights

The 2006 Annual Reception and Awards Ceremony was held at Jenner & Block, to whom LCBH offers our sincerest gratitude for the firms' generosity and dedication to the organization and to ensuring housing opportunities and justice for low-income families in Chicago. We would also like to thank our silent auction donors for offering their talents and exciting prizes to support safe, decent and affordable housing. A special thanks to Bernie Kleina for his ongoing commitment to supporting LCBH and all of our endeavors through his own advocacy and with his amazing photography. As always, the ceremony, company, entertainment, food, and view were exceptional.

The keynote address was given by Alexander Polikoff, who served as lead counsel on one of the great civil rights cases coming out of Chicago, *Gautreaux v. CHA and HUD*, and who has stayed the course in his battle to end racial inequality and segregation. This journey is now chronicled in his book, *Waiting for Gautreaux*, which was published this year and is already going in to its second printing. He has received numerous awards and recognitions, most recently the Lifetime Achievement Award for 2006 by the American Lawyer Magazine. Alexander's 40-year career is described by author Scott Turow as a "crusade to bring the constitutional promise of equality to public housing." Through his work as a public interest lawyer and his 29-year tenure as executive director of Business and Professional People for the Public Interest, our speaker represents everything that is exemplary about the legal profession.

### The awards presented and their recipients include:

#### AOD Attorney of the Year

**Louis DiSanto, Wildman Harrold**

#### Barbara Grau Housing Advocacy Award

**Alan Mills, Uptown People's Law Center**

His career has been devoted to public interest law, and he is known for his legal expertise and tenacious advocacy. He is the Legal Director of the Uptown Peoples' Law Center and works with LCBH on eviction court reform.

#### LCBH Founders' Award

**Sharon King, Sidley Austin LLP**

Sharon has contributed greatly to the growth and development of LCBH. Starting as a volunteer in our AOD Program, she soon joined the Board of Directors where she has served as president,

vice president, and head of the board development committee. Sharon has given generously of her time and money, has been responsible for contributions totaling nearly half a million dollars, and has recruited other outstanding individuals to our Board.

#### Outstanding Friend of LCBH Award

**Charter One**

Charter One has been an enthusiastic partner to LCBH, continuously increasing their support and helping us make meaningful connections in their neighborhood community areas.

**Wildman Harrold LLP**

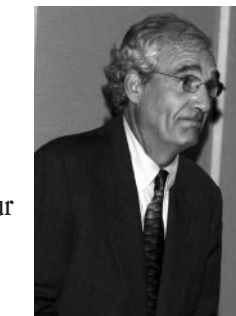
Wildman Harrold has become a true friend to LCBH, with extensive pro bono time from partners and associates, coupled with generous financial assistance.

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#### Outstanding Volunteer

**Greg Furda, Sidley Austin LLP**

Greg has worked tirelessly on behalf of LCBH. He has been a member of our Advisory Council for four years, joining our Fund Raising Committee, where he has been instrumental in our Major Gifts Initiative and a joint campaign to solicit law firms on our behalf.



Greg Furda

Photograph by Al DiFranco

#### Special Recognition, Legal Justice Advocate:

**Honorable Timothy C. Evans, Chief Judge, Circuit Court of Cook County**

Chief Judge Evans has partnered with LCBH and other advocates to improve eviction court and launch a social services referral desk. Beginning with his work on passage of the Residential Tenant



Judge Evans

Photograph by Al DiFranco

Landlord when he was a Chicago alderman, he has had a lifelong commitment to justice. ■

## Renter's Tip

Whenever possible do not pay your landlord in cash.

Paying with a money order or check will help you keep track of payments in the event a dispute arises. If paying in cash, insist that your landlord give you a receipt. If a landlord refuses to provide you with a receipt, bring a friend along as a witness and follow up with a letter (with proof of mailing) confirming when and where you paid the rent in cash.

To better understand your rights and obligations as a tenant please refer to, The Renters Resource Guide, available in English and Spanish, at: <http://www.lcbh.org/rentersresource.html>.

## The Ins and Outs of LCBH

### LCBH Welcomes and Greatly Appreciates our Interns and Legal Volunteers:

Yvette Barclay, Sara Cieniewski, Maria DeHowitt, Cindy Flores, Dustin Jenskins, Valerie Raedy, Brett Scheive, Melvin Ann Ward

### Please welcome our newest staff members:

Therese Ferguson

*Administrative Assistant to the Executive Director*

Sharon Goott

*Intake and Tenant Education Specialist, Americorp VISTA*

Debra A. Bell Griffin

*HomeSharing Coordinator*

Rasheda Dennis Jackson

*Paralegal*

Andrea Juracek

*Development and Policy Specialist,*

*Americorp VISTA*

### LCBH offers our best wishes and sincerest gratitude to outgoing staff member:



Photograph by Al DiFranco

#### Cecilia "Ceci" Abundis

Ceci spent five years at LCBH, first as a law clerk from September 2001 through December of 2003, and then as an Equal Justice Fellow from

September 2004 through September 2006. In that role, Ceci developed the Source of Income Discrimination Project to provide education on Chicago's fair housing laws and to represent housing choice voucher holder who had been discriminated against by Chicago landlords. Ceci's dedication to achieving justice for her clients inspired and motivated many individuals. We know Ceci will continue to demonstrate what it is to be a champion of human rights in her new position with the Illinois Attorney General's office.

### Board News

LCBH is pleased to welcome our newest Board Member, Mark Rojas, from Charter One Bank