

## Daily Gazette article

Saturday, May 8, 2010

<http://www.dailygazette.com/>  
See HTML Version of article

**Lawyer lauded for pro bono work**

By Tatiana Zarnowski

**SARATOGA SPRINGS** — When Emily Muller walks down the street, people want to reconnect with her.

People she served in the soup kitchen come up to her, women she helped in domestic violence situations and parents who hired her to fight for child custody.

Muller knows all their names, said her friend and former employer Barbara L. Glaser.

"She has the ability to greet anybody, no matter what their background, with real grace and care," Glaser said. "They often come to thank her or tell her what they're doing now. There's a deeply human connection between her and them."

Muller, 62, a lawyer known for her work with the poor, is one of 20 winners statewide of the New York State Bar Association's 2010 President's Pro Bono Service Awards.

She provided 63 hours of pro bono services last year, focusing on contested divorce and child support cases, according to the bar association.

Muller won the pro bono award for the 4th Judicial District, which covers 11 counties, including Saratoga, Schenectady, Fulton and Montgomery.

"She absolutely deserves it," said former Saratoga County Economic Opportunity Council director Dennis Brunelle.

When Muller took on Tricia Salisbury's divorce case in 2002, it wasn't initially a pro bono case. But Muller went far beyond what a lawyer would be expected to do, coming to help prepare for Salisbury's garage sale when she sold her house and even offering to take care of her dog for a couple of months until the pooch could be sent to California, where Salisbury now lives.

Salisbury, who has multiple sclerosis and a rare blood disease that killed her daughter at age 20, uses a wheelchair to get around. She was bereft over the loss of her daughter, and her father 12 weeks later, when she filed for divorce from her husband of 27 years.

Muller listened to the details of their marriage and Salisbury's grief over losing her daughter and father, and then she cried.

"She was like a mom," Salisbury said by phone from her home in Murrieta, Calif. "It was one of the most painful periods of my life. I don't know if I could have done it without her."

helping hand

Muller had a hand in several groups helping the underprivileged since she moved to Saratoga Springs in 1985. She worked for the Saratoga County Economic Opportunity Council, ran the EOC's soup kitchen and volunteered on the original Shelters of Saratoga committee. After her two daughters were grown, she got her law degree and bought Douglas Mills' practice at 480 Broadway.

Now Muller also is a member of the Women's Global Giving Circle, a local group Glaser started that helps women internationally gain economic stability.

Muller showed her dedication to the underprivileged by her tireless work, including sleeping overnight as a volunteer in the new Shelters of Saratoga after it was formed as the first men's homeless shelter in the 1990s, said longtime friend Stephanie Melvin.

Melvin said Muller also understood that helping EOC clients meant giving them more than a meal.

"I think that Emily might have been a little bit before her time, inasmuch that even though she ran the food program at EOC, she understood that you had to understand the challenges that person was facing," she said. "I think that EOC operates that way today."

Muller did it while she and her husband, Brien, raised two daughters. The couple lives in Milton now and their daughters are grown: Mary Margaret Coppers lives in Cazenovia and Anne Muller in Austin, Texas.

Melvin said Muller's family hosted foreign exchange students while she was growing up in western Pennsylvania and Ohio; she and Brien have continued that tradition and currently have French students staying with them.

Helping others came naturally, Muller said.

"I think having worked in human services since 1985 and having seen since 1985 all the need there is, and having everything I need, I just wanted to be able to help whoever I can."

After leaving the EOC, Muller directed Saratoga Rape Crisis for a short time and then worked for Glaser as an administrator and program developer for several projects, including the fledgling Open Space Project, which later became Saratoga PLAN.

That's when she decided to go to law school, inspired by two women she knew who went back to law school as adults.

"I believe that watching them, [I saw] that they could do so much more for their clients than I was able to," Muller said.

"She gave me a call one day and she said, 'What do you think about me going to law school?'" Brunelle recalled. Muller started at Albany Law School in 1994 and graduated four years later.

She bought Mills' Broadway law practice when he became City Court judge a little over 10 years ago.

As a lawyer, she handled various cases for free when EOC clients were in domestic violence situations, had creditors they couldn't pay or were getting evicted from their homes.

"To this day, we know if we call her for help, regardless of how much she's got on her plate, she would help out," Brunelle said.

Muller is an elder in her church, Presbyterian-New England Congregational Church on Circular Street.

"Since I've known her, she has reached out to those who the rest of us might tend to forget," said the Rev. Jay Ekman. "She's just a super person who has incredible patience, and it takes a lot of patience to work with people in general and people in need in particular."