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*In this Issue:*

### Disability Law



### FEATURES

- |  |    |
|--|----|
| <b>NJL Launches Law Student AuNJL Launches Law Student Authorship Project</b>  | 6  |
| <b>Autism and Divorce: Guidelines for Family Court Practice</b><br>by Lawrence R. Jones and David L. Holmes  | 7  |
| <b>Trusts for the Benefit of Disabled Persons: Understanding the Differences Between Special Needs Trusts and Supplemental Benefits Trusts</b><br>by Gary Mazart and Regina M. Spielberg | 18 |
| <b>Navigating the Labyrinth: Where to Turn When the Child with Developmental Disabilities Grows Up</b><br>by S. Paul Prior and Amy E. Duff   | 26 |
| <b>Disabling the ADAAA</b><br>by Stephanie Wilson and E. David Krulewicz   | 31 |
| <b>Dealing With Changing Family/Medical Leave and Disability Management Laws in 2009</b><br>by David B. Lichtenberg, Justin B. Cutlip and Gregory T. Alvarez                             | 36 |
| <b>The ABCs of SSDI, aka DIB:<br/>A Primer on Social Security Disability Insurance Law</b><br>by Lynda Yamamoto  | 41 |
| <b>Special Education: Practical Applications of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act</b><br>by Viola S. Lordi and Eric I. Bueide                                  | 46 |
| <b>ERISA and Conflict of Interest</b><br>by Brian R. Lehrer  | 49 |

### DEPARTMENTS

- |  |    |
|--|----|
| President's Perspective  | 2  |
| Message From the Special Editor  | 3  |
| Legislative Corner:<br>State Bar Association Seeks Changes in Guardianship and Protective Proceedings Jurisdiction<br>by Valerie Brown | 53 |
| Law Office Management:<br>Things That Go Together: Marketing and Public Relations<br>by Cheryl Pessolano and Julianne Weinmann         | 54 |
| Balancing the Scales: Rock & Roll Lawyers<br>by Brian J. Fruehling   | 56 |
| Ethics   | 58 |
| Lawyers Bookshelf  | 59 |
| Legal Arts: Ten Lessons I Hope to Teach My Three Daughters Before They Stop Listening to Me Altogether<br>by Claudia Trupp             | 61 |

# BALANCING THE SCALES

## Rock & Roll Lawyers

by Brian J. Fruehling

I've been practicing law for over 20 years. I began my law career in 1987, as a litigation associate at Gould & Wilkie (now Thompson Hine), a Wall Street law firm, where I learned the basics from some pretty solid old-time lawyers. By the 1990s I had moved back to New Jersey, and decided to open my own shop. My solo practice has always been concentrated in commercial litigation, focused primarily on shareholder disputes, contracts, collections, employment issues, and personal injury cases.

I served on the District X Ethics Committee from 2000–2002, and became chair of the committee in 2003. After chairing the ethics committee for the year, I developed my own practice representing attorneys in ethics matters. From 2000 to date, I have also been very active in the Morris County Bar Association (MCBA), for the last eight years or so chairing the MCBA Lawyer Referral Service and becoming an MCBA trustee in 2002. I am currently the first vice president of the association.

Like many litigation attorneys, I have my fair share of war stories, wins, losses, draws, staff and secretarial drama, not to mention an incredible array of clients from all walks of life. In balance, it's been a pretty good ride, with perhaps the most rewarding part being those times when I've really made a difference in someone's life, saved somebody's hide, won a big money case, or all of the above wrapped into one great case. In my travels as a journeyman attorney I have kept my sanity and sense of humor by playing the drums, most recently with a rock & roll band called The Impostors.

In grammar school I started playing the drums, taking lessons from a professional rock drummer on a huge drum kit meant for arena rock concerts. My teacher played with professional rock bands, including Looking Glass and Orleans, back in the early 1970s. I took lessons for about three years with my teacher until he told me to get lost, pushing me out of the nest in 1975. By age 13 I was, according to my teacher, ready to play in my own band.

My teacher got me an audition with a local rock band in Summit called Echo Mountain (a great name, I still think), and I played with that band for a few years. We played many hits of the day, including Edgar Winter, Hendrix, Clapton,

Bad Company, and the Doobie Brothers.

I have been playing drums and singing with rock bands on and off for the last 34 years. (Now, that's a scary thought. Even scarier, we still play a lot of the old songs from the 1960s and 1970s, with some 'newer' music by bands like The Pretenders, Dire Straits, Tom Petty, and Squeeze sprinkled in.)

About five years ago, I was between bands and was having a beer with Bob McAndrew, Esq. (past president of the MCBA, and

**Somehow we got onto the subject of music, and Bob told me that he played guitar. I told him about my drumming history, and with a handshake (and another beer) we had a new band in the works.**

a solo in Cedar Knolls) after an MCBA meeting in Morristown. Somehow we got onto the subject of music, and Bob told me that he played guitar. I told him about my drumming history, and with a handshake (and another beer) we had a new band in the works. I had a great guitar player from previous bands, Roy Root, who was an incredibly gifted musician waiting in the wings and anxious to play some music. So, I got Bob and Roy together at my place for some jam sessions. Like most bands, the drummer's house becomes the band's studio by default. It's simply too much effort to move drum equipment around every week for practice, so the studio blossoms in the drummer's basement. It takes a very understanding spouse to accept this reality, and luckily I have one of those in my wife Wendy. She allows the band to take over the house most Friday evenings for rehearsals as the place bounces around on its foundation.

Bob, Roy and I started practicing for a few weeks and then we added a fourth member to the band—sometimes another guitarist but most recently Mark Harris, a professional quality bassist. Once we got our footing and had a decent amount of material, it was time to gig at local clubs, block parties, or

wherever we could play. Because Bob and I are both busy solos and run our own practices, the deal was, and continues to be, that our band plays for fun and for charity. We don't need (or want) another job, and playing a substantial number of gigs and hustling for money is not in the cards.

Bob and I started bringing the band out to play some Morris County Bar Association functions, like the Beefsteak Dinner we throw every year at the Brookside Club and the Lawyers for Kids 5K Race in Morris Township at Ginty Field, run by the Morris County Bar Foundation. The Lawyers for Kids 5K Race raises substantial funds to help benefit the Court-Appointed Special Advocates of Morris and Sussex counties (CASA). That race was the brainchild of Bill Krais, Esq. (a partner at Porzio Bromberg in Morristown), and really helps CASA serve kids in need.

We figured it would be a blast to perform for our friends and colleagues of the bar while simultaneously adding some entertainment value to those events. Bob and I recognize that we have to work hard as lawyers and get results for our clients, but we also wanted to promote the social aspect of being a member of the bar. I think we have done that. Sharing our enjoyment of music with other lawyers who might not normally let their hair down is worth the effort of rehearsing and hauling our gear around to various charity events.

One particular dinner dance fundraiser that Bob got the band has turned into my favorite yearly gig. We play for Josephine's Place, which is a great resource for women needing assistance, whether it's to learn English, or involves other challenges for the program's mostly immigrant clientele.

Josephine's Place was founded by the Sisters of Charity, and is based in Elizabeth. The center is run by Sister Judy Mertz, whose boundless energy and enthusiasm in providing service to women in need is inspiring, to say the least.

The first year we played the event at the Mediterranean Club in Newark, and the last few years it has been at Mayfair Farms in West Orange. It is heartwarming to hear some of the clients speak during the program, and express their gratitude to the sisters, and to the center's patrons and volunteers, who keep Josephine's Place alive and vital. Many of the patrons of the center are New Jersey lawyers, as is the dinner organizer, Margaret Sherlock, Esq. (Margaret runs a firm in East Hanover.) This past November, the charity dinner dance drew 210 attendees and raised record contributions to help fund the center. The Impostors contributed the music, and, as always, we were happy to be part of such a meaningful organization.

Playing with The Impostors has been a lot of fun, and in our own loud way we hope to contribute a little something to brighten the spirits of attorneys and help worthy causes like the Lawyers for Kids 5K and Josephine's Place. ♪

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