

# Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 153, No. 133

Monday, July 9, 2007

## Amicus Curious

### Summer clerks come with a cause

By Pat Milhizer  
Law Bulletin staff writer

The charity football game that David Burciaga organized in college had all the aspects of a typical game — team huddles, referees, sponsors and even uniforms.

“Well, there are uniforms to start with,” Burciaga clarified, “but you can imagine after getting tackled in the mud, it’s kind of hard to tell who’s on your team.”

The muddy patch on the University of Michigan campus in 2003 wasn’t a byproduct of heavy rain that day, but was created by Burciaga and his fraternity brothers to raise \$7,000 for children’s cancer research. The “Mud Bowl” also drew the attention of ESPN camera crews already on the Ann Arbor, Mich., campus that day for the Wolverines’ football game.

Burciaga, 24, is one of seven law students working at Corboy & Demetrio P.C. this summer as clerks. And this year’s group didn’t go through college without making a mark and learning outside the classroom.

In addition to his charity work in college, Burciaga, who has finished his first year at Chicago-Kent College of Law, has helped students at Chicago’s Marshall High School prepare for the ACT and SAT exams.

A track record of helping others is one of the common themes found among Corboy clerks.

“It goes to the basic core philosophy of the firm and what we do,” said Michael K. Demetrio. “The history of the firm is we’ve done nothing but help people who have been terribly hurt or lost loved ones. In order to do that, it’s not something you can do just for money, just as a job. You’ve got to have a passion.”

Erin Comerford, who plans to graduate from Wake Forest University School of Law next year, volunteered for a summer at a soup kitchen in a squatter community in Peru. For most of the elderly people living in an area plagued by violence and drugs, the kitchen provided the only food they had for the day.

“I don’t even know if I could put it into words,” Comerford, 26, said about the experience. “It was

life changing, and it was just every day you wake up in Peru, it’s an adventure.”

Like most of the clerks, Eric Anderson is still trying to figure out what kind of law he will practice after he graduates from The John Marshall Law School. In the meantime, he spends a night every three months giving sandwiches to homeless youth in Lakeview through a program run by St. Alphonsus Church.

“It’s just fulfilling. You get so busy with your life and forget about those who don’t have it as easy. Doing this just keeps everything in perspective how lucky you are to have a roof over your head, a family, a hot meal,” said Anderson, 31.

“You see people that don’t have those things, right under your nose in your neighborhood that you don’t even know are there,” Anderson said.

During his four years at Marquette University, Chip Leen served in the Navy Reserve Officer Training Corps and graduated with a degree in international affairs. He was deployed twice to the Persian Gulf in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and helped with tsunami aid relief in 2004 and 2005 in Sri Lanka.

Leen received the Navy Achievement Medal for leadership during Operation Iraqi Freedom and the Distinguished Humanitarian Service Medal for his work after the tsunami.

“We went to the coast of Sri Lanka, brought 700 marines and rebuilt schools, drinking facilities and shored up the shore line,” said Leen, now in his second year at Loyola University Chicago School of Law.

“It was a valuable experience working with these guys, going overseas ... it really gave me a different perspective on people and culture,” Leen said.

While studying in Chile as an undergraduate student at the University of Notre Dame, Tim Brennan taught English to youngsters. Staying with a family there, he also learned to sleep without any heat.

“The price of oil is very expensive, so at night they wouldn’t have the heater running,” said Brennan, who will be a third-year law student at

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Loyola. "I remember seeing my breath at night while going to sleep."

Dan Pylman, 23, spent part of his last summer before law school teaching English in Greece. The educational work was nothing new: Pylman worked in similar programs in high school and tutored Cook County Jail inmates while he attended Wheaton College.

Pylman, who will be starting his second year at Chicago-Kent, said the experiences exposed him to "average people who are going through difficult times in their lives who need a hand. It gives you a sympathetic heart for people who are less privileged than I am."

"I feel like here [at Corboy & Demetrio] we get to represent average people, many who are struggling at different times in their lives," Pylman said. "They're putting themselves into attorneys' hands and asking for help. It's very rewarding to be exposed to people who give you that level of trust."

Ray Steadmon, 24, attended Ferris State

University in Big Rapids, Mich., where he spent time as a resident assistant in a dormitory.

"I came from a pretty small town in Michigan where everyone was more middle or upper class, and there were not a lot of minorities. Living in the dorms, exposed me to life outside Mattawan, Mich.," said Steadmon, who attends Chicago-Kent.

Steadmon also has interned with a county sheriff's department in Michigan, working as a correctional officer, spending time in the dispatch department and riding along with patrol officers.

Corboy & Demetrio receives about four or five inquiries each day from law students seeking a clerk position, and Demetrio said he's looking for a specific quality in each applicant.

"You've got to have people who want to give," Demetrio said. "My experience is people, even at that young age, who have done service projects and gone beyond the norm is someone who is a good fit for us."