

Maryland Lawyer

News and analysis of legal matters in Maryland

Pro bono

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Repaying the privilege of practicing law

BY BRENDAN KEARNEY

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When the **Jewish Legal Services Clinic** opened its doors in Northwest Baltimore 10 years ago, Harry A. Baumohl was among the first attorneys to volunteer.

"There was a need in the Jewish community for a legal services program," Baumohl said in a recent interview. "I was excited that it had been formed and that I could meet their needs."

Baumohl, who practices mostly family law in Towson, has advised clients at the monthly volunteer-run clinic ever since.

While the clinic's volunteer list now numbers in the hundreds, according to co-chair Joel Simon, few attorneys come more than once a year. Baumohl said he generally signs up to staff the Park Heights multipurpose office for four or five monthly sessions each year.

"He's one you can count on," said Roz Asch, who coordinated the program from 2002 to 2006.

The clinic, held the second Monday of most months from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m., offers "basically, half an hour with a lawyer," said Simon, whose paying job is as head of development for **LifeBridge Health Inc.**

On any given night, he said, four to six pro bono attorneys will counsel eight to 15 indigent clients "depending on the phases of the moon, certainly on the weather."

Eligibility for the program is flexibly based on the **Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service's** standards, Simon said, and people come to the clinic with the full range of legal issues, from bank-

ruptcy to immigration. Baumohl takes family cases, usually divorce and custody, but sometimes related to domestic violence.

In addition to staffing the clinic, Baumohl said he also takes "a handful" of referrals each year from the clinic, cases in which a client requires more substantial or ongoing legal help.

"I generally have found myself taking almost anything that has been requested of me," Baumohl said.

His most memorable consult might have been a woman who was massively pregnant with twins or triplets when her husband left her without any support or assets.

Baumohl said he helped the woman get a divorce, custody of the children, child support and marital property, and the clinic was able to help address the woman's non-legal needs by lining up respite care.

"There are some clients out there that you just naturally just want to help and who are appreciative when they receive that help," he said. "It often takes a bold step for a person to walk into a clinic not knowing anything about the attorney with whom they'll be speaking and then wanting to divulge the most personal aspects of their marriage."

Simon said Baumohl's legal and emotional intelligence rewards clients for taking that plunge.

"He really understands both the technical aspects of family law and the psychological aspects of it," Simon said. "If you want him to be as zealous as he can be, he will be. But he tries to look at the whole family dynamic. I think that makes him a good lawyer."

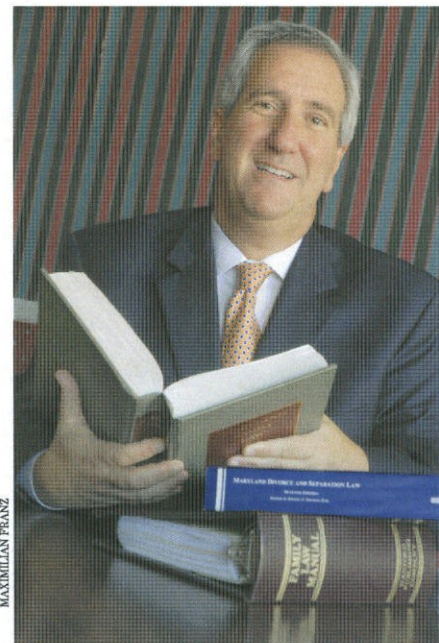
Baumohl said he also takes pro bono

cases from the courts, the **Women's Law Center** and **CHANA**, a Jewish domestic violence group. He is motivated in part by what he views as the privilege of his profession.

"My philosophy has always been the state has granted lawyers a license — not everyone can practice," he said. "Part of the obligation of being licensed is to give something back to the community that has the need for my services."

And as a Jewish man himself, Baumohl believes he has a particular faith-based duty.

"Part and parcel of being Jewish is to help the community," he said. "It's who I am; it's what I do."



MAXIMILIAN FRANZ

In addition to his other pro bono work, Harry A. Baumohl has been a regular volunteer at Jewish Legal Services since its inception 10 years ago. "I was excited that it had been formed and that I could meet their needs," he says.

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