

**PENNSYLVANIA LEGAL AID NETWORK
EXCELLENCE AWARD
2010 NOMINATION
(Nominations are due by Monday, December 7, 2009)**

I. NAME, ADDRESS & TELEPHONE NUMBER OF NOMINEE

Please provide name as it should appear on award. Also, include nominee's mailing address and telephone number:

James Montero

II. CATEGORY

Please indicate under which category you are submitting this nomination:

Legal Services Staff -- Northwestern Legal Services

III. NOMINEE'S EXPERIENCE

Please provide an outline of this individual's experience with or on behalf of legal aid programs and its clients. Be as specific as possible:

- 1.) James Montero, Erie office manager and paralegal at Northwestern Legal Services, will be celebrating his 35th anniversary of service to the low-income community in our region in June 2010. During these many years of consecutive service to our clients, he has consistently demonstrated the highest standards of professionalism and integrity in the performance of his job responsibilities, and has become an important advocate for Spanish-speaking individuals and families in northwestern Pennsylvania.
- 2.) A Vietnam Veteran who served honorably in the U.S. Army from 1966 – 1968, Jim Montero was working at the General Electric Plant in Erie, Pennsylvania when he was recruited by Legal Services for Northwestern Pennsylvania in June 1975 to provide advocacy and outreach to the migrant farm workers in our region. In 1977, he transitioned from this work with the migrant community into a staff position as paralegal and Affirmative Action Officer in the Erie office.
- 3.) In March 1991, Jim was promoted to the position of Erie Office Manager at Northwestern Legal Services. In addition to his ongoing work as a paralegal representing low-income clients in administrative law cases, he began supervising the daily operations of the Erie office at Northwestern Legal Services. Nineteen years later, he continues to provide leadership to the Erie office, the largest of the six staffed-offices in our 10-county service region.
- 4.) In addition to his 35 years of service to legal aid in northwestern Pennsylvania, Jim has been a strong advocate for the Hispanic community in our region. He was one of the “founding fathers” of the Hispanic-American Council of Erie, now called the Multicultural Community Resource Center, an organization providing a broad range of social services to Spanish-speaking clients and refugees/immigrants that

have resettled in the region. He served on the board of directors, including a term as board president, for this organization.

- 5.) In addition to his work with the Multicultural Community Resource Center, Jim was also a founding member of Minority Health Education Delivery System (MHEDS), a program that provides health services to individuals and families from ethnically diverse backgrounds.
- 6.) In 2006, Jim was appointed by the Erie County executive to serve on the Erie County Public Defender's Advisory Committee that provides regular feedback about services to the low-income community in cases where incarceration is a possible result, along with other juvenile and mental health cases.

IV. NOMINEE'S EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

Please provide a summary of the reason(s) you feel this individual presents an example of excellence. Outline any unique qualities that make your nominee stand out among the many excellent advocates and friends of legal aid. **The Awards Committee will look for specific examples of excellence, and will take into consideration commendation letters, relevant news clippings, or other documents that support the nomination.**

When Jim Montero was recruited in June 1975 by Legal Services for Northwestern Pennsylvania, the organization that was to change its name in later years to Northwestern Legal Services, he was asked to provide legal aid advocacy and outreach to migrant farm workers working the grape fields and fruit orchards in the region. Nearly thirty-five years later, he continues to promote our mission of service to the low-income community with civil legal needs, and especially to the Hispanic community of Erie.

Originally from Erie, Jim served honorably in the U.S. Army in Vietnam from 1966 to 1968, and following his military service he began working at the General Electric Plant in Erie. He was recruited by the legal aid organization in June 1975 to work with migrant farm workers, in part because of his bi-lingual fluency in Spanish and English. He transitioned in 1977 to a staff position as a paralegal and Affirmative Action Officer for the Erie office of Northwestern Legal Services. In March 1991, Jim was promoted to the position of Erie Office Manager at Northwestern Legal Services. While he continued to represent low-income clients in administrative law cases, he began supervising the daily operations of the Erie office at Northwestern Legal Services. Nineteen years later, he continues to provide leadership to the Erie office, the largest of the six staffed-offices in our 10-county service region.

For the client community he has served for three-and-a-half decades, and for colleagues on the legal aid staff in northwestern Pennsylvania, Jim has consistently demonstrated the highest standards of "professionalism" and "integrity" in the performance of his duties as a legal aid law worker. Although he has a quiet demeanor, he is very conscientious in his advocacy for our clients, and he competently represents their interests in administrative law cases. As manager of the Erie office, he brings the same "calm and competent" demeanor to his administrative responsibilities as supervisor of day-to-day operations of the Erie unit. Although Jim has had more lucrative job offers over the years, he has remained with legal aid because he believes in our mission.

While Jim's many years of faithful service to the cause of legal aid in northwestern Pennsylvania is reason enough for selection as a recipient of the PLAN Excellence Award, his strong commitment to the needs of the Hispanic community in Erie must also be recognized in this narrative. Jim was one of the "founding fathers" of the Hispanic-American Council of Erie, an organization that changed its name in 2009 to the Multicultural Community Resource Center. The center provides a wide range of social services to Spanish-speaking clients in the region, as well as immigrants/refugees that have resettled in the Erie area. Jim served on the board of directors, including board president, for this organization and he continues to be an important resource for their efforts.

In addition to his work for the Hispanic community in Erie, Jim was also a founding member of Minority Health Education Delivery System (MHEDS), a program that provides health services to individuals and families from ethnically diverse backgrounds. He has also served since 2006 on the Erie County Public Defender's Advisory Committee that provides regular feedback about services to the low-income community in cases where incarceration is a possible result, along with other juvenile and mental health cases.

In his letter of support to this Excellence Award nomination (see attachment), Joel Tuzynski, executive director of the Multicultural Community Resource Center, recognizes the important role model that Jim Montero has become for Hispanic children and adults in the region. In actuality, his calm, professional manner in our mission of service to the low-income community with civil legal needs is an example for us all.

V. NOMINATOR

Please provide your name, address, and daytime phone number:

Robert A. Oakley, Esq.
Executive Director
Northwestern Legal Services

VI. REFERENCES (Optional)

Please provide contact information for others who are familiar with this nominee's examples of excellence. The Awards Committee may contact these individuals for additional supporting testimonials and, if this nominee is selected, the individuals may be asked to provide content for the award video.

Joel C. Tuzynski
Executive Director
Multicultural Community Resource Center