



## Women's Fund Excellence Grant Comes to Legal Aid

Legal Aid of Nebraska's work keeping women independent has been recognized by the Women's Fund of Greater Omaha, which awarded the non-profit agency a \$25,000 "Excellence in Service to Women" grant. Legal Aid of Nebraska is using the funds for its domestic violence prevention program.

Women constitute 75 percent of Legal Aid's cases, with the majority involving domestic violence. Last year, the agency served 2,883 women in Omaha, compared with 2,876 in 2006. Legal Aid served 8,574 women statewide in 2007.

"Not only does Legal Aid work to keep women safe, it helps by finding ways to make them self-sufficient," said Executive Director Doug German. "Women come to us in despair with landlord-tenant disputes, conflicts over property ownership, domestic relations, divorce, child custody, mental health, immigration issues, Social Security, financial matters and many other problems. By helping low-income women be self-sufficient, Legal Aid helps women continue to be productive workers, taxpayers and part of the community."

Legal Aid's domestic violence program is focused first on safety and then on helping women become self-sufficient and independent. In addition to providing direct legal services, Legal Aid's staff works with the YWCA, Catholic Charities, Heartland Family Services, Justice for our Neighbors, Lutheran Family Services, the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council and all Omaha domestic violence shelters to meet the immediate needs of women facing domestic violence issues.

The award process noted how women are instrumental in Legal Aid's organization. More than half of all Legal Aid staff members, its board of directors and two of five members of the management team are women.

This is the first time the Women's Fund has given an "Excellence in Service to Women" grant, which is unique in that the funds can be used for general operating expenses or programming.

"We had 16 very good applicants, some of which had not previously applied for our community grants," said Sara Woods, Women's Fund grants committee chair. "It was very inspiring to see what these organizations are doing for women. In the end, the committee and the Women's Fund board of directors agreed Legal Aid of Nebraska's successes merit the agency receiving the excellence grant."



### MILLIGAN HONORED

*John Milligan, a senior attorney in the Lincoln office, recently received the Ruth Miller Award for Outstanding Advocacy. The award and a \$500 stipend are given annually to an advocate in the firm as determined by nominations made by firm members followed by a selection committee's decision. Ruth Miller was a Legal Aid board member from the early 1970s to 2002. Executive Director Doug German presented the award as Board President Matthew Dunning, standing-left, and board members William Tringe and Charla Peeks, seated, looked on.*

## Timothy Riveria Brings 'Katrina' Experience to Legal Aid Staff



After spending 10 months in Louisiana working with the Katrina Pro Bono Legal Corps, Timothy J. Riveria is back at home in Omaha, working as an associate attorney for Legal Aid of Nebraska.

Growing up in north Omaha, Riveria saw firsthand the social inequities and problems facing the community. "I went to law school to learn how to help folks who are in these situations," he says. "Coming to work for Legal Aid of Nebraska is a natural fit for me, given the agency's role working with people who are in poverty."

Riveria received his undergraduate degree from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, then worked at Girls and Boys Town for a year before entering law school at the University of Iowa. As a third-year law student, he spent a week of spring break in New Orleans helping with recovery efforts after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. In addition to hearing the news reports of the destruction, Riveria also had a personal tie to the area -- his grandfather's home was flooded and he lived in a FEMA trailer while his home was repaired.

"After seeing the destruction, I was eager to go back and help out again," Riveria said. Following graduation from law school, Riveria returned to Louisiana as an Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps attorney with the Katrina Pro Bono Legal Corps. Housed at the Louisiana State University Law Center in Baton Rouge, Riveria primarily worked to get LSU and Southern University law students involved in the recovery efforts.

One of the projects Riveria worked with was helping applicants obtain "Road Home" funds so they could rebuild damaged homes. When property was acquired as a result of death, the applicants had to show they had the rightful title to the property by opening a succession, and Riveria's office came up with a system to quickly process small, uncontested successions. He also put together a coalition of immigration attorneys, public defenders and immigration advocates to address problems facing the Latino population, many of them migrant workers who came to New Orleans to help with rebuilding efforts.

Riveria recounted this work in an article published in the August 2007 issue of *The Nebraska Lawyer*. "At the end of my service term, I am confident that not only my perspective of the recovery effort will be changed, but my perspective as to the positive power of this profession will be changed as well," he wrote. His term ended in December.

Riveria said that what stands out most during his time with the Katrina Pro Bono Legal Corps is realizing that -- even with major issues facing the area -- helping individuals with smaller problems is important. "Just giving people a little information can make a big difference," he said.



*Timothy Riveria speaks at an informational event on successions law and estate planning in Baton Rouge, La.*