

Pro Bono Attorney of the Month
Francine H. Moss

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The Suffolk Pro Bono Project is pleased to honor Francine H. Moss, once again, as its Pro Bono Attorney of the Month for the substantial work she has done recently on behalf of our matrimonial clients. Ms. Moss is receiving this honor for the third time. She first received the honor in 2000 and was later honored in 2005. Ms. Moss began representing the Project's matrimonial clients in 1995 and has regularly accepted referrals since that time.

Ms. Moss sees pro bono work as an imperative. She states, "When there are people who have a real need and yet no way to protect their rights, we as attorneys should be there for them." Maria Dosso, Nassau Suffolk Law Services Director of Communications and Volunteer Services is grateful for the many hours of work Ms. Moss has devoted to her Pro Bono Project clients, noting, "experienced and generous attorneys like Francine are the back-bone of the Project."

In her many years with the Project, Ms. Moss has never shied away from challenging cases. This is exemplified in her most recently completed case for the Project in which she represented a domestic violence victim who was a non-English speaking Asian immigrant. The client had been exploited by her affluent husband and forced into servitude. When the case began, the client had recently fled from her abusive spouse, was homeless, and temporarily living in a shelter run by a local organization that assists victims of domestic violence. The client had no supports in this country other than the assistance she was receiving from the domestic violence organization. Ms. Moss was able to communicate with the client throughout the case by utilizing the language interpreter and translation services provided by the Project. The client was determined to start a new life for herself here on Long Island, free of her husband's abuse and exploitation. To achieve the best possible result for her client, Ms. Moss remained in close contact with the domestic violence organization's staff assisting her. She sought out consultation from immigration law specialists to avoid inadvertently jeopardizing the client's immigration status through actions taken in the divorce. From these consultations, Ms. Moss crafted an effective legal strategy predicated on the husband's maintenance obligations on his existing financial obligations to her as her immigration sponsor. The approach worked. In fairly short order Ms. Moss obtained a substantial lump-sum maintenance concession from the spouse. With her financial recovery, the client was able to move out of the shelter, find employment and begin her life beyond her ex-husband's reach.

While appreciating that matrimonial law isn't for everyone, Ms. Moss truly enjoys it, largely because of its multi-dimensional aspects. "You wear a lot of hats in this type of work," she explains. "There's always an emotional piece to these cases and you assume many roles for the client. You're their lawyer and their psychologist." She also enjoys the fact that the cases are challenging in that they require knowledge of several different substantive areas of the law, including real estate, bankruptcy and, as in the case of her recent pro bono matter, immigration law. "This work really keeps you on your toes," says Ms. Moss.

Prior to going to law school, Ms. Moss studied sociology at Brooklyn College, where she developed an interest in criminal and juvenile justice. After earning her bachelor's degree in 1973, she attended New York University Law School, earning her J.D. in 1978. Immediately after graduating, she was hired by the Bay Shore law firm, Flower and Plotka. Working alongside named partner Richard Plotka, Ms. Moss received her training in matrimonial and family law.

In 1980, she left Flower and Plotka to become the managing attorney at the Bohemia office of Jacoby and Meyers, which at that time had a general legal practice involving matrimonial, criminal and bankruptcy matters. This was high-volume office with approximately 100 new consults each month, says Ms. Moss. While at Jacoby and Meyers, she met her current law partner, fellow matrimonial/family law attorney and Pro Bono Project mentor, Stephanie Judd.

Ms. Moss and Ms. Judd left Jacoby and Meyers in 1995 and together formed their current firm, Judd & Moss in Ronkonkoma. Since its inception, the majority of the firm's practice has been matrimonial and family law, but on occasion includes real estate and wills/trusts matters. Of their matrimonial and family law cases, approximately seventy percent involve private clients. The remainder are 18b and Law Guardian cases assigned by the Court.

Ms. Moss's life outside of the practice law is centered on her many interests, which include theatre (especially musicals), sports (She's an avid Yankees and Jets fan.), reading (history and novels), food and wine. She has been married for 38 years to Steven Moss, a nuclear engineer at Brookhaven National Laboratory who currently manages the license for BNL's newest and the world's brightest National Synchrotron Light Source. Their two children, Hillary and Ian Moss, have followed in their parents' footsteps. Ian studied law at Hofstra University and is now a matrimonial and family law attorney at Ray Mitev & Associates. Hillary, like her father, has chosen a career in the sciences. She will soon graduate from Stony Brook University Medical School and begin practicing emergency medicine.

The Pro Bono Project is pleased to recognize Francine Moss once again for her pro bono contributions. We are proud of our long association with her and look forward to our future work together. It is with great pleasure that we honor Ms. Moss this third time as Pro Bono Attorney of the Month.

The Suffolk Pro Bono Project is a joint effort of Nassau Suffolk Law Services, the Suffolk County Bar Association and the Suffolk County Pro Bono Foundation, who, for many years, have joined resources toward the goal of providing free legal assistance to Suffolk County residents who are dealing with economic hardship. Nassau Suffolk Law Services is a non-profit civil legal services agency, providing free legal assistance to Long Islanders, primarily in the areas of benefits advocacy, homelessness prevention (foreclosure and eviction defense), access to health care, and services to special populations such as domestic violence victims, disabled, and adult home resident. The provision of free services is prioritized based on financial need and funding is often inadequate in these areas. Furthermore, there is no funding for the general provision of matrimonial or bankruptcy representation, therefore the demand for pro bono assistance is the greatest in these areas. If you would like to volunteer, please contact Ellen Krakow, Esq. 631 232-2400 x 3323.

