

Children's Law Center celebrates 10 years of legal advocacy

Its lawyers are voices of children in domestic violence cases

BY TODD LUCK
THE CHRONICLE

For the last 10 years, the Children's Law Center (CLC) has been legally advocating for children. CLC provides a voice for vulnerable children in court cases such as domestic violence cases, high conflict custody cases and children with educational issues.

For its 10th anniversary celebration on Thursday, Sept. 17, the nonprofit held a public lecture at the Old Salem Visitor Center with best-selling author and advocate Brian Martin and put on a fundraiser that night at Rooftop Terrace.

In domestic violence cases, CLC lawyers are appointed by a judge to be Guardians ad Litem, acting as the eyes and ears of the court in regard to children when a protective order has been filed. They'll investigate the case, including interviewing the parents and children involved and doing research into how the child is doing in school. They then provide the court with recommendations, which may include custody arrangements and counseling. Because of CLC's limited resources, usually only the most egregious cases are

referred to them.

Martin, who grew up in a home with domestic violence and now works to help children in that same situation, said there are few nonprofits like CLC.

"I think the work that they're doing the Children's Law Center is very unique. I have not come upon it in many communities," he said. "And the fact that they're approaching this from the standpoint of what happens when someone grows up in domestic violence is very forward-thinking, really very pioneering."

Martin is the author of "Invincible - The 10 Lies You Learn Growing Up with Domestic Violence, and the Truths to Set You Free" and founder of New York-based Children of Domestic Violence.

He said children living with childhood domestic violence, in which children witness domestic violence but aren't necessarily abused themselves, can have a lifetime of negative effects, including being more likely to become an abuser as an adult. He said growing up in that environment can hardwire the developing brain in a bad way that can require help to overcome.

CLC Executive Director Iris Sunshine said CLC has had 900 cases over the last decade.

She estimated CLC will serve 250 children in 200 cases this year alone. The nonprofit has four lawyers, including Sunshine herself, who also handles cases. It also has a multitude of lawyers from law firms like Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton who do pro bono work for it.

She said CLC's work is important because domestic violence has such a profound effect on children that it's similar to the Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome that soldiers face, and increases their chance for teen pregnancy, suicide and other negative outcomes.

"What these children experience, what they live through, will stay with them for the rest of their life," said Sunshine.

Attorneys Penny Spry and Amy Kuhlman founded CLC 10 years ago as a solution to a problem. The duo was volunteering with Winston-Salem Legal Aid to represent children in high conflict custody battles and domestic violence situations. The two found there was a conflict of interest in representing children in the same cases where Legal Aid was representing one of the parents. They decided to create their own nonprofit to represent children. They had lots of community support with donations of money, pro bono hours and even office space to help make the fledgling firm work.

"We didn't have a 10-year plan; we were day to day, month to month," said Spry.

Spry and Kuhlman said they were glad to see CLC going strong 10 years later. Kuhlman said the mission of CLC remains the same.

"When we work with children, our hope is to someday make them healthy adults so that it doesn't perpetuate from generation to generation," she said.

One place CLC gets help from is law



students in the Child Advocacy Clinic at Wake Forest Law. The students in the class work on actual cases that have been referred to CLC. To help prepare them to work on domestic violence cases, CLC has the father/son duo of Scotty and Shiloh Daum speak to them. Scotty Daum bringing a unique perspective to the course, having formerly been a perpetrator of domestic violence. He said he used to try to bully and intimidate in his home and would try to game the police and the system to get away with it.

"They're not going to stop doing what they're doing on their own," said Scotty Daum about domestic abusers.

He said it took a series of interventions over the years to get him to change, including what he described as "a very brave act" from Shiloh, then only 13 years old, to call the police to get him to stop. Since then, he's gotten the help he needs and said he is very grateful to his children for giving him a second chance.

Shiloh Daum, who is now an eminent domain attorney who volunteers as a Guardian ad Litem, said that there is much more awareness of domestic violence now than when he grew up and the legal system takes it more seriously and is better equipped to deal with it.

"This is a contagious illness such as it is, that's inherited. We get it from our parents," he said about domestic violence. "It's taught to us, these behavioral patterns, these cycles, and it can be taught out of us, but there has to be an intervention."

Spring Lake mayor gets into U.S. Senate race to challenge Burr

BY GARY D. ROBERTSON
ASSOCIATED PRESS

RALEIGH, N.C. — The mayor of a small North Carolina town near Fort Bragg is running next year for the U.S. Senate seat currently held by Republican Richard Burr.

Spring Lake Mayor Chris Rey unveiled his candidacy Monday, Sept. 21, with website and Facebook postings. Rey's decision marks the first Democrat to announce among a handful of current or former elected officials looking at a Senate bid.

The 38-year-old is a National Guard officer previously on active duty in the Army and has served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Rey says if elected he would work to fully implement

health care reform, lower the small business tax rate and promote public education and veterans' assistance.

Any primary elections appear slated for mid-March. Republicans in the legislature want to move the primaries up from May.

Rey distributed an email seeking donations as he announced his bid on Monday.

He has visited Winston-Salem in an effort to gain support for a run for higher office. A reception was held at The Enterprise Banquet and Conference Center for him in April, sponsored by the Friends of Chris Rey. No one specified a higher office at that time.

Chronicle Managing Editor Donna Rogers contributed to this report.



Rey



Burr



Clean. Safe. Secure.

Closing coal ash basins in the Carolinas.

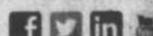
Across the Carolinas, we're making significant progress to clean up and permanently close all our coal ash basins. We've partnered with some of the nation's top scientists and engineers to develop smart, effective ways to safely close basins and protect our communities' natural resources. We're setting a new standard in leading the Carolinas to a safer, cleaner energy future.

Quick fact:

We recycle nearly half of the coal ash produced by our company today and are looking for new ways to safely reuse even more of this valuable construction material.



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