



## **Pro Bono Attorney Spotlight: Mary Hartnett & Richard Cino**

Mary Hartnett, a solo practitioner who represents special needs students, and Richard Cino, the managing shareholder of the Morristown, New Jersey office of the national law firm Jackson Lewis P.C., met as students at Seton Hall University School of Law. They ultimately married and raised a family. And recently, through VLJ, the couple accomplished a family first: serving as co-counsel in a complex education law pro bono case and obtaining a favorable decision for the client. Then they donated their court awarded fee of \$15,000 to VLJ.

"Rich and I have always wanted to work together and we're happy the way it turned out," Mary says.

The client was a special education student being bullied mercilessly. The law suit alleged the school district failed to properly address the issue. Mary and Rich got involved, and eventually obtained a successful settlement on behalf of the parents: the child and the bullies were assigned to different schools.

Mary initially brought the matter into her firm in Red Bank and she also consulted with the Education Law Center and VLJ on bullying issues. VLJ helped her obtain the services of Michael Greene, Ph.D., Senior Fellow, School of Criminal Justice, Rutgers, the State University, a sought-after expert witness in such matters.

Mary then partnered with her husband on the case. Rich says, "Jackson Lewis has a very significant pro bono commitment. The ability to help others really motivates our attorneys and is incredibly rewarding." In addition to this case, Rich and other attorneys in the Morristown office have volunteered at VLJ's DLRP clinics to assist victims of Superstorm Sandy. Along with the attorney hours devoted to the special education/bullying case, Mary and Rich noted the significant contribution of Rich's administrative assistant, Normandie Koenig, to the matter.

Mary's passion for special education law was fueled by her experience growing up with her sister, Liz, who has cerebral palsy. Before opening her solo practice, she worked for many years as Director of the Special Education Clinic at Rutgers School of Law-Newark.

Mary says the case is instructive for lawyers in any field considering a coordination of their pro bono efforts with VLJ: "When it comes to dealing with experts and others in a case, an association with VLJ adds a great measure of legitimacy to the representation. You're not just a lawyer; you are part of something bigger."

As for pro bono work in general, she says, "It's important for lawyers to use their knowledge to give to their communities. It makes the clients happy and that makes lawyers happy."