

## For Immediate Release

July 28, 2010

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### Katten Announces Recipients of 11<sup>th</sup> Annual *Pro Bono* Service Awards

**CHICAGO** – Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP is pleased to announce that it has selected 10 attorneys to receive its top honor for *pro bono* service. The recipients of the firm's 11<sup>th</sup> annual *Pro Bono* Service Awards in Chicago are Litigation and Dispute Resolution partner **Alexander S. Vesselinovitch** and Corporate associate **David J. Kelly**. In New York, the Litigation and Dispute Resolution team of partner **Steven Shiffman** and associates **Cameron Balahan**, **Gregory C. Johnson** and **Brian L. Muldrew** is being honored, along with Intellectual Property associate **David B. Sherman**. Also recognized with Katten's top honor for *pro bono* service are Los Angeles Litigation and Dispute Resolution associate **Cory A. Baskin**, Washington Litigation and Dispute Resolution associate **Matthew Erik Fischer**, and Charlotte Bankruptcy and Creditors' Rights associate **Angela R. Perry**.

This year's award recipients provided *pro bono* services in a wide array of legal situations, including the following:

- Obtaining a jury award of more than half a million dollars for a family of Puerto Rican heritage who had been terrorized by their Chicago neighbor for two years based on their national origin.
- Winning rescission of a contract through which a mentally ill woman was defrauded out of her home by conduct the Supreme Court of New York said "shock[s] the conscience of the court."
- Helping the Hudson River Foundation develop and protect a social networking site bringing together people to support its efforts to preserve the Hudson River Valley.
- Providing ongoing *pro bono* legal counsel to U.S. armed services veterans in securing the benefits to which the law entitles them.
- Stopping the deportation of a young man from Eritrea who fled from persecution, including torture, in his home country, based on false accusations of working with a group opposing the government.
- Representing a Ugandan torture victim in seeking asylum in the United States.
- Securing an appropriate educational program for a Charlotte child with special needs.
- Negotiating contracts with Grammy Award-winning artists for a benefit concert for an inner-city Chicago social service center that provides free health clinics, job training and youth mentoring programs.

- Assisting the Central District of California's Civil Rights *Pro Bono* Panel in representing a young pre-trial detainee severely beaten by prison guards.

This year's *Pro Bono* Service Awards will be presented during ceremonies in each recipient's office location between July 28 and September 23. Thomas Morsch, Professor Emeritus and Emeritus Director of the Northwestern University School of Law's Small Business Opportunity Center, will present the awards in Chicago, while Laura Negron, Director of the Guardianship Project at the Vera Institute of Justice will present in New York. In Los Angeles, Judge Christina Ann Snyder of the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California will present the awards, and Thomas A. Moore, Program Manager of Lawyers Serving Warriors, a project of the National Veterans Legal Services Program, will present in the Washington office. In Charlotte, Judge Yvonne Mims Evans of the Superior Court of Mecklenburg County will present the awards.

"The recipients of our 11<sup>th</sup> annual *Pro Bono* Service Awards have made outstanding and selfless contributions to charitable and nonprofit causes across the country," said Vincent A. F. Sergi, Katten's National Managing Partner. "These individuals embody Katten's long-standing commitment to providing first-rate representation without charge to underserved populations who would not otherwise be able to afford it. We are proud to honor them for their work."

The *Pro Bono* Service Awards include a \$1,000 honorarium, which recipients will donate to a charity of their choice. The following summaries highlight the recipients' *pro bono* work:

#### **Alexander S. Vesselinovitch**

Mr. Vesselinovitch and a team of associates, in cooperation with the National Immigrant Justice Center, this year represented a young man from Eritrea who fled from persecution, including torture, in his home country, based on false accusations of working with a group opposing the government. The man, however, had previously worked for a then-opposition group, now the Eritrean government, that fell within the U.S. government's definition of a "terrorist organization." This barred him from asylum status. Mr. Vesselinovitch and his team took on the much more demanding burden of using the U.N. Convention Against Torture to prevent the client's removal from the United States, and the judge, for what he said was the first time in a long career, granted this relief.

Last year Mr. Vesselinovitch and an associate won a jury award of \$520,000 in compensatory and punitive damages in a civil action under the Illinois Hate Crimes Act on behalf of a Chicago family of Puerto Rican heritage who had been terrorized by a neighbor, through a two-year campaign of verbal assaults and threats of violence, based on their national origin.

As a partner, Mr. Vesselinovitch not only supervises associate *pro bono* work but also is actively engaged in every aspect of his cases. He acts as an advocate for the firm's *pro bono* work, actively encouraging colleagues to participate, and serves on Katten's Chicago *Pro Bono* Committee.

Mr. Vesselinovitch will donate his honorarium to the Chicago Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law Inc., for its Bias Violence Project.

#### **David J. Kelly**

Mr. Kelly joined Katten in 2004 and since then has applied his transactional legal skills on behalf of Chicago's Inner-City Muslim Action Network, a Chicago social service agency; Split Pillow NFP, a

nonprofit film company; and the Ray of Hope Center for the Arts, a Chicago organization that engages youth in the arts.

Mr. Kelly is currently involved in what he considers his most important *pro bono* case to date—the representation of a Ugandan asylum seeker, Natal Lulu. Mr. Lulu's case is truly one of life and death, as he was tortured in Uganda and fears more of the same if returned to his home country.

Mr. Kelly is donating his honorarium to the Boys & Girls Clubs of Chicago, in memory of the late Gerald M. Penner, a longtime Katten partner who passed away earlier this year.

**Steven Shiffman, Cameron Balahan, Gregory C. Johnson and Brian L. Muldrew (team)**

The team of Mr. Shiffman, Mr. Balahan, Mr. Johnson and Mr. Muldrew served as *pro bono* counsel for Rhoda Stockton, a mentally ill woman who was defrauded out of her home through conduct that the Supreme Court of New York said, “shock[s] the conscience of the court.”

Following more than six years of litigation, the team won summary judgment in favor of their client, ordering rescission of the “unconscionable” contract under which the client sold her home for an amount that an appraiser retained by all parties found was less than one-third of what it was worth. The team established for the court that the defendants had repeatedly and aggressively solicited a woman “tortured by mental illness” (acknowledged by defendants’ own psychiatric examiner), set her up with a lawyer they chose to serve as her “counsel” and transported her from her home to defendants’ offices where, without even this “counsel” present to review and advise her on the documents, she signed away her home. She had signed, the court observed, “the sort of agreement that is so one-sided that no person in his or her right mind would make it on the one hand, and no honest and fair person would accept it on the other.”

The team members will donate their honoraria to the Vera Institute, the David Dawes Nee II Foundation, the Foundation for the Children of Iran and the Polycystic Kidney Disease Foundation.

**David Sherman**

Mr. Sherman, who joined the firm in 2007, has done a significant amount of *pro bono* work with the Volunteers of Legal Service (VOLS). Katten’s continuing involvement with VOLS includes overseeing its Microenterprise Project, for which the firm won a VOLS *Pro Bono* Award in 2009. On July 13, 2010, at a reception held at Gracie Mansion, the VOLS Microenterprise Project was selected for recognition by Mayor Bloomberg and the City of New York as part of its Neighborhood Achievement Awards. As part of this project, Mr. Sherman has developed a course on “Intellectual Property Basics,” which he and other attorneys present at New York City Business Solutions Centers. The course introduces the concept of intellectual property to entrepreneurs and small business owners and provides basic, practical information to help them grow and build value in their businesses. At a recent lecture, one member of the audience told VOLS Director Bill Dean that the “evening had changed her life.”

Mr. Sherman was referred to the Hudson River Foundation through VOLS. He assisted the Foundation in drafting documents for its new website, OurHudson.org, an online forum to bring people together in support of the preservation of the Hudson River Valley. The site supports the goal of the Hudson Fulton Champlain Quadricentennial Commission to advance a vision and practical agenda for the Hudson Valley.

Mr. Sherman will donate his honorarium to Publicolor.

**Cory A. Baskin**

Mr. Baskin, who joined Katten in September 2008, became involved in the firm's *pro bono* program working with partner Steve Cochran and the Central District of California's Civil Rights *Pro Bono* Panel to represent an inmate, Jonathan Peter Martinez, in a civil rights action pending in the Central District of California.

Mr. Baskin is representing Mr. Martinez in a suit that seeks damages against Los Angeles County sheriff's deputies for injuries sustained by the plaintiff while he was a pre-trial detainee in the Los Angeles County Men's Jail. Mr. Martinez alleges that he was severely beaten in July 2002 after refusing to exit his cell upon the orders of jail deputies. When Mr. Baskin took on this assignment, its scope was limited to helping Mr. Martinez obtain default judgment against a single deputy defendant. His role, as well as the scope of the case, has increased. After a recent victory on a discovery dispute and unsuccessful settlement negotiations, Mr. Baskin is preparing to represent Mr. Martinez in his upcoming trial.

Mr. Baskin will donate his honorarium to Public Counsel.

**Matthew Erik Fischer**

Mr. Fischer has led attorneys in Katten's Washington office in providing ongoing vital legal support to armed services veterans. He developed a veterans' legal manual on behalf of the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, served as a panelist at the 2009 Annual Meeting of the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, and has recruited fellow Katten attorneys to work with him in securing for veterans the benefits to which the law entitles them. Mr. Fischer notes that for many veterans, benefit appeals cases can drag on for 18 months, and it's the small victories that make the work rewarding.

Mr. Fischer will donate his honorarium to the National Veterans Legal Services Program.

**Angela R. Perry**

Ms. Perry became involved in *pro bono* service at Katten working with a fellow Charlotte attorney to represent a child with numerous special needs in a case against his local school district. In what became her most memorable *pro bono* case, Ms. Perry and her colleague filed a due process petition alleging that the school district failed to tailor the child's education program to his unique needs. They further sought reimbursement of private school tuition for the student. The case was successfully resolved and Ms. Perry continues to assist the student in obtaining an appropriate education.

Ms. Perry will donate her honorarium to Hospice & Palliative Care Charlotte Region.

Katten has a long-term commitment to helping the poor, the powerless and the disenfranchised obtain first-rate representation without charge. Attorneys and other legal professionals give their time, resources and talent to serve individuals and organizations in need, to engage in important national litigation, and to partner with local legal service providers to ensure access to the justice system. Our *pro bono* program includes litigation, both on behalf of individuals and groups, in matters of housing and public accommodations discrimination, civil liberties, immigration, criminal defense, prisoners' rights and consumer matters. We also perform transactional work in such areas as corporate and tax assistance for nonprofit organizations, intellectual property law, employee benefits and international trade law.

*Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP is a full-service law firm with more than 600 attorneys in locations across the United States and an affiliate in London. The firm's business-savvy professionals provide clients in numerous industries with sophisticated, high-value legal services, with a focus on corporate, financial*

*services, litigation, real estate, commercial finance, intellectual property and trusts and estates. Among our clients are a wide range of public and private companies, including a third of the Fortune 100, as well as a number of government and nonprofit organizations and individuals. For additional information, visit [www.kattenlaw.com](http://www.kattenlaw.com).*

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