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DAILY BRIEFS

LAD to sponsor employer workshop on hiring ex-offenders

Legal Aid and Defender Association, Inc. (LAD) will sponsor a free informational workshop for employers on hiring former criminal offenders Thursday, March 26 from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. at Michigan First Credit Union, 27000 Evergreen Road, Lathrup Village.

Speakers will include representatives of LAD, the Michigan Department of Corrections and the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; experienced employers; and former offenders recently released from incarceration.

Employers will learn about the advantages of hiring former offenders, including tax credits; potential liability for refusing to hire them; prisoner re-entry programs; and community safety.

Employers can register for the workshop onsite March 26 at 1:00 p.m. or in advance by calling LAD's Oakland County office in Pontiac at (248) 253-1548, ext. 4009.

Volunteers needed for Michigan's Foster Care Review Boards

The Foster Care Review Board Program, administered by the State Court Administrative Office of the Michigan Supreme Court, is seeking 25 citizen volunteers for membership on review boards located throughout the state.

Recruitment for board membership is year-round, but volunteers are encouraged to submit their applications by March 15. Interviews and background checks are required for all applicants.

A training session will take place in Lansing April 30 – May 1.

Responsibilities include reviewing selected cases of children in foster care, reading written case materials and surveys, and interviewing interested parties to the case.

Volunteers selected must reside within the county of their local board, are appointed to a three-year term, and are required to attend regularly scheduled review meetings one day each month, in addition to occasional foster parent appeals.

Citizen volunteers should demonstrate an interest in children and their welfare. Younger volunteers are encouraged to apply. The program would like to have as diverse a board as possible representing the county.

Michigan's Foster Care Review Board Program helps ensure safe and timely permanency for children in the state foster care system.

Documentary 'Seeking Truth in the Balkans' to be screened Feb. 25

A documentary screening about the legacy of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and a panel discussion on the topic will take place Wednesday, Feb. 25, at Wayne State University Law School. The award-winning film, "Seeking Truth in the Balkans," offers insights from more than 100 people who were involved with the tribunal, which was created by the United Nations in 1993, after the former state of Yugoslavia devolved into chaos and age-old ethnic tensions led to atrocities. The free event will take place from 4 to 6 p.m. in the Spencer M. Partrich Auditorium at the law school, 471 W. Palmer St. Register at international.law@wayne.edu.



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Soul Food



Wayne State University Law School's Black Law Student Association and Damon J. Keith Center for Civil Rights presented a Soul Food Café fundraiser Thursday, Feb. 19. Catered by Faustina's Creole and Soul Food, the menu included mac and cheese, collard greens, chicken gumbo, ribs, red beans and rice, peach cobbler and cornbread. During the event, the documentary Eyes on the Prize was shown.

Photo courtesy of Wayne State University Law School

'A pit bull in heels'

Lawyer rebrands her firm, website to reflect personality

By KURT ANTHONY KRUG
Legal News

Annette Benson is brutally honest; she's not afraid to call out her own clients.

"It's all about taking ownership," explained Benson, 45, the head of Annette Benson Law in Bingham Farms. "It's all about facing reality. I don't tell them what they want to hear; I tell them the truth. I don't believe in [telling them what they want to hear]. I tell them, 'Here's the reality: This is the best case scenario and this is the worst case scenario. Let's make some decisions. You'll get reality – ready or not – that's why you're here. We're not in a land of denial. This is real.'"

Benson's reputation for being aggressive in the courtroom earned her the moniker "a pit bull in heels" – something she takes as a compliment. She joked that while she's "five-foot nothing" in her stocking feet, she can give with the best of them. The heels give her an extra five inches, so she can be seen as well as heard.

"Everyone comments on my shoes," said Benson, who even went to court once when she was severely ill, wearing her pajamas, robe, and slippers. After meeting privately with the judge – whom, she said, didn't bat an eye at her attire – she went to the hospital.

"I am completely comfortable bucking the status quo and forging my own path," said Benson, who lives in West Bloomfield with her husband and two children. "Nothing intimidates me."

The daughter of European immigrants, Benson graduated from Andover High School (now Bloomfield Hills High School) in 1987. From there, she earned her undergraduate degree in social sciences from Michigan State University in 1991 and her juris doctor from the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law in 1993. She's been a practicing attorney for 21 years.

"I knew at a young age that was what I wanted to do, probably because both my parents were immigrants. Growing up and hearing the traumas they experienced and the sacrifices they made to get here – the United States is the land of opportunity – that inspired me the most to be whatever I wanted to be and to help people find their voice..." recalled Benson.

She chose to go into family law after seeing Seymour Markowitz, a practicing attorney in Bingham Farms, interact with a judge during her

A Michigan State grad, Annette Benson earned her law degree from the University of Detroit Mercy.



first year of law school.

"He was different from what I'd seen of lawyers. He said what he wanted to say. He wasn't your typical suit, he wasn't robotic. He was animated and passionate; he was his own person, which was inspiring for me to be me and not play a role," said Benson. "What I like about family law is you're dealing with people, interacting with people, and you see an impact. I didn't want to be a paper-pusher; I'm definitely a people-person. Being able to see change and make the change was very rewarding right away."

Benson began her law career working for the American Divorce Association for Men (ADAM) for four years, then spent one year at the law firm Adkison, Need & Allen in Bloomfield Hills before taking time off to be with her two children, now 17 and 15.

"I learned a valuable lesson: Being a stay-at-home parent is the hardest job in the world," said Benson. "That lasted less than two years. I missed my career."

In 2000, she founded Annette J. Benson and Associates.

"I work for myself because I always wanted the ability to be selective about whom I worked with in terms of staff and in terms of clients. I

really have to feel connected to the client and I have to feel the passion. In my experience in the short time I've worked for other firms, I didn't have that luxury," she said. "I've always stayed true to myself. What I learned from Seymour is be your own person; it's okay to stand out and do things differently because there are people who want you for that reason. Through the years, I've stayed true to that."

Late last year, she rebranded her firm and her website. Annette J. Benson and Associates became Annette Benson Law. She employs four people: associate attorney Amy Byer, associate attorney Alicia Champine, office manager Colleen Williams, and bookkeeper Shellye Dade.

Unlike more traditional legal websites, Benson's is campy and unconventional, highlighting her personality. The home-page features a black and white photo of Benson, clad in a dress, holding a briefcase and personalized boxing gloves with line drawings of identical, non-descript suits in the background.

"Why not state what I've always been and be more comfortable doing it? So I redesigned my web-site; it's very different from other lawyers' web-sites. That is me – it's who we are, you got

See **LAWYER**, Page 3

Law prof relishes role as university's faculty athletics rep

Wayne State University Law School Professor Robert Ackerman spent three days recently at NCAA Headquarters in Indiana representing WSU.

He attended the NCAA's Division II Faculty Athletics Representative Fellows Institute, where discussions and presentations covered leadership, communications among different campus constituencies and protection of student welfare. A large part of the discussion involved the issue of concussions and brain injuries and steps college athletic programs can and should take to address them. Ackerman has been WSU's faculty athletics representative since 2008, and he takes the role seriously.

"I've always been interested in sports," he said. "I was a high school athlete, but not a college athlete. I was sports director of my college radio station. I find a number of the compliance issues that come up actually require some lawyering. NCAA regulations can be very difficult to parse."



Robert Ackerman

A year ago, WSU hired Alex Tiseo as its assistant athletics director for compliance. In his role as faculty athletics representative, Ackerman works fairly often with Tiseo.

"The idea is to maintain academic control over the athletic program," Ackerman said. "I report periodically to the Academic Senate and to the president."

The professor, who graduated from Harvard Law School and stepped down as dean of Wayne Law in 2012, also serves as a member of the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletics Conference management council. He previously served on the conference's executive committee and serves on its eligibility and membership committees. And he's one of three faculty liaisons to WSU's football team. He established the faculty liaisons program with WSU's sports programs a few years ago, seeking volunteers via email each year and getting a good response.

"I wanted to draw the campus closer together and provide more support for student athletes," Ackerman said.

The role of faculty liaison also sometimes can help to recruit interested undergraduate students to Wayne Law, said the professor, who concentrates his scholarship on torts, dispute resolution and communitarianism.

Other law school faculty members who have volunteered as faculty liaisons include Charles Brower, Anthony Dillof, Noah Hall, and Peter Henning.

Law deans to speak at WLAM Foundation reception

The WLAM Foundation has announced that this year's reception will feature a "TED" Talk with Dean Jocelyn Benson of Wayne State University Law School; Phyllis L. Crocker of University of Detroit Mercy School of Law; and Joan W. Howarth of Michigan State University College of Law. The WLAM Foundation's Reception on March 25 is also the occasion to introduce the ten 2015 Outstanding Women Law Students chosen to receive a total of \$30,000 in scholarships supporting their law school education.

This year also marks the WLAM Foundation's 19th year of making awards to deserving women law students. In that time, 225 awardees have received a total of \$530,000 in financial support. All in all, the Reception offers many reasons to celebrate. The Awards Reception takes place at the Great Lakes Culinary Center in Southfield, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., at a suggested donation of \$30 per attendee. The Great Lakes Culinary Center is located at 24101 West Nine Mile Road in Southfield.

Please join the WLAM Foundation by registering for the event by March 20th: contact Barb at (248) 740-7003 to charge by phone, or charge online at www.wlamfoundation.org.

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