

INDIVIDUAL HONOREE



JOHN RACANELLI, *Farrell Fritz, P.C.*

Expert real estate counsel helps nonprofits with complex commercial lease transactions

John Racanelli developed his real estate experience from his dual role for many years as both principal and general counsel of a prominent real estate development and construction business. During the last four years, Mr. Racanelli assisted three nonprofits with complex leasehold condominium real estate matters, a specialized type of lease structure. He worked with **The Hope Program**, **Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute**, and **WHIN Music Community Charter School (WHIN)**. For WHIN, a charter elementary school in Washington Heights, in addition to creating the leasehold condominium, Mr. Racanelli negotiated access agreements with the owners of seven adjoining properties. He helped the school negotiate these access agreements quickly in order to start the construction of a new charter school. The new building allowed WHIN to scale up to include more grades each year. Without Mr. Racanelli's assistance, WHIN would not have been able to move into the new building serving 458 children in time for the new school year.

Employment:

Farrell Fritz, P.C.
Partner, Real Estate

Graduate of:

New York University
School of Law

Lawyers Alliance clients:

Caribbean Cultural Center
African Diaspora Institute
The Hope Program
WHIN Music Community
Charter School

Q. How and why did you first become involved with Lawyers Alliance?

Farrell Fritz's Pro Bono Committee regularly distributes pro bono opportunities to attorneys in the firm, and I jumped in when I saw the Lawyers Alliance description of the WHIN matter.

Q. Share a tip for making time for pro bono.

Not a tip, really. A pro bono client, once the attorney is retained, is like any other client, and the attorney must handle its matters with integrity, diligence, and dispatch.

Q. Share a fun or unexpected moment from pro bono work through Lawyers Alliance.

By the time I started my engagement with WHIN, a lease of a parking garage to be converted was close to being signed, and an enormous amount of work had been done by WHIN in securing financing and designing its new home. It came as a shock to WHIN and its advocates that the site of its new home was no longer feasible due to a change in MTA bus routing that would prohibit the parking of school buses in front of the school. Fortunately, a new location was found with the same landlord and, due to the resilience, dedication, and persistence of the WHIN team, WHIN was able to proceed with realizing its dream of a new home.

Q. What's the most rewarding aspect of pro bono work?

I've had a lifetime passion for education and the arts, and have served on the boards, sometimes as chairman, and through my pro bono work I have the opportunity to pursue that passion and give in another, meaningful way.

"John was very responsive and available. He helped us negotiate the access agreements under the wire and allowed us to begin construction on our new school."

— Charles Ortiz

Executive Director, WHIN Music Community Charter School