

Dispensing Dollars & Sense: Pro Bono Lawyer Helps to Negotiate a New Lease for Community Credit Union

It arrived at Lawyers Alliance for New York in a regular way – manila envelope, stamps and postal markings of the usual sort. Inside, the contents were anything but ordinary. The envelope held a carefully prepared Request for Legal Assistance Form (LAF) from the **Bushwick Cooperative Federal Credit Union** (currently known as the Brooklyn Cooperative Federal Credit Union).

Once the pages of the LAF were released from the envelope and spilled across an attorney's desk at Lawyers Alliance for New York, the compelling story unfolded of a low-income neighborhood in dire need of a credible financial institution and a community development credit union willing to help. Among other things, the application stated: "The mission of the Bushwick Cooperative Federal Credit Union is to deliver affordable financial services to the economically disadvantaged community of Bushwick. The core services include: savings accounts, small-scale loans, and educational opportunities." The application also requested legal assistance in reviewing loan policies and procedures to ensure they were in accordance with the organization's newly established charter. Hooked, the legal director and staff attorneys not only decided that the plans and activities of the Bushwick Cooperative FCU met Lawyers Alliance's mission criteria, but they also determined that this organization had a concrete legal matter that fell within the scope of work done by Lawyers Alliance.

As a result, staff attorneys arranged a screening meeting; Lawyers Alliance and the Bushwick Cooperative FCU signed a retainer agreement; a pro bono attorney volunteered; and the case proceeded through a host of legal channels until the loan policies and procedures were drafted to the satisfaction of both the lawyers and client. That was five years ago, and today Lawyers Alliance staff and volunteer attorneys are still serving the Brooklyn Cooperative FCU.

Most recently, **Marc Hurel**, a pro bono attorney from **DLA Piper Rudnick Gray Cary US LLP**, helped the Brooklyn Cooperative FCU avert a potential real estate emergency by negotiating a long-term lease. Earlier this year the Brooklyn Cooperative FCU sought to move its offices to another suitable location. After identifying a space that seemed perfect, together with Marc Hurel, they spent several months negotiating a deal. In the final hours, the deal fell through leaving the Brooklyn Cooperative FCU scrambling in its search for a new home.

Fortunately, several weeks later the Brooklyn Cooperative FCU found a possible space at 1474 Myrtle Avenue, and Marc Hurel again was ready to help. However, time was tight because the client was facing 30 days notice to vacate their current offices. Unfazed, Mr. Hurel drafted and sent a lease that was signed promptly by all parties.

On July 30, 2005 another envelope arrived at Lawyers Alliance. This time it was addressed to Senior Staff Attorney **Neil Stevenson** and contained a copy of a thank you letter sent to Marc Hurel in which **Jack Lawson**, Manager and Financial Officer of Brooklyn Cooperative FCU, wrote: "On behalf of our staff, board, and membership, I want to thank you, once again, for your help in securing our new lease at 1474 Myrtle Avenue. As you know, the pressure to vacate our current offices, a small budget, management of existing programs, and, not least, rapidly inflating local real estate market, all conspired to make the search process especially challenging for us. Your unwavering support and guidance through the process was a critical asset. I sincerely believe that we have struck a deal that will benefit credit union members for decades to come." Echoing this sentiment, Mr. Lawson indicated on his *Closing Questionnaire for Clients* (a survey sent to clients by Lawyers Alliance when a case is complete) that Lawyers Alliance's assistance enabled the Brooklyn Cooperative FCU to acquire/lease property. Similarly, it said that the volunteer attorney was professional, prompt, concerned, and smart while the Lawyers Alliance attorney was available and in the loop as needed.

Lawyers Alliance has, therefore, helped to solve legal matters that will enable members of the Brooklyn Cooperative FCU to buzz through a new space contributing to their savings accounts, securing loans, attending educational seminars, and using newly installed ATMs. ■

Become a Volunteer

To join Marc Hurel and the hundreds of other attorneys who serve as pro bono counsel for Lawyers Alliance's clients, you can contact Jolynda Burton, Pro Bono Coordinator, at 212-219-1800 ext. 242.

Become a Client

To join the Brooklyn Cooperative Federal Credit Union and the more than 450 other nonprofit clients and community groups that Lawyers Alliance serves each year, call Angela Cheng, Program Associate for Client Relations, at 212-219-1800 ext. 278. Our legal staff looks forward to discussing with you the compatibility between your organization's mission and that of Lawyers Alliance as well as the nature of the legal assistance that your nonprofit organization requires.