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BASF, Panasonic Legal Teams Help Run Pro Bono Clinics for Veterans

EAST ORANGE, NJ – May 22, 2017 – Huddled over tables at the Veterans Administration Hospital, teams of lawyers from BASF Corporation and Panasonic Corporation of North America are on a mission far beyond their job descriptions.

They are providing free legal help so veterans can surmount barriers as they re-enter civilian life.

It's a far cry from the real estate, compliance, litigation, employment, and mergers and acquisitions matters the lawyers typically handle.

But for both corporations, it illustrates a strong legal department commitment – including the general counsel, staff lawyers, paralegals and administrative staff – to give back to the veteran community.

Since the beginning of the year, the two corporations have been switching off every other month to help lead the recently created Veterans Legal Wellness Clinic run by Volunteer Lawyers for Justice (VLJ) at the VA Hospital.

Lawyers from BASF, based in Florham Park, partner with those from Day Pitney in Parsippany. Lawyers from Panasonic, based in Newark, join forces with those from Nukk-Freeman & Cerra in Chatham and McGuireWoods in New York City.

“This particular group of individuals – veterans of the armed services – is incredibly underserved and highly deserving of the legal counsel we can provide,” says BASF General Counsel Matthew Lepore.

Says Panasonic General Counsel Damien Atkins: “Giving back is a responsibility, not a choice. There will never be enough ways to express our gratitude to those who have sacrificed so much to ensure the liberties we all enjoy.”

Lawyers from both corporations advise 15 to 20 veterans each month on expungements, bankruptcy, driver's license restoration, child support, divorce and other matters. In some cases, the lawyers shepherd veterans to a VLJ program that deals with the specific legal

issue at hand.

A 10-lawyer legal team, assisted by two to five paralegals and staff members, is on site at the hospital to help the veterans — who served in Iraq, Afghanistan, Vietnam and Korea.

“It’s important that we act on our values, not just repeat them,” says Atkins. It’s especially rewarding, he says, that the clinic provides an opportunity to “make an immediate impact on someone’s life, to do something tangible.”

That often requires drilling down to the root of the problem, which might not be apparent at the outset.

For example, Lepore says, a veteran might be facing an eviction because a renewal notice went to the wrong address. “So the real issue is why you were evicted,” says Lepore, whose department selected the clinic as its signature pro bono project.

VLJ, with a staff lawyer at each clinic, provides training for the volunteers, and that preparation is not limited to legal matters. It also covers social and economic issues veterans encounter and why they are in their current circumstances.

The BASF and Panasonic legal departments play a role in all aspects of the clinic’s operation – from providing legal advice to making copies to ordering and serving breakfast and snacks to veterans as they wait their turn to speak with the lawyers.

For both corporations, the clinic is an outgrowth of a deep and hands-on dedication to their communities and a desire to help the nation’s veterans. And having the chief legal officer involved says a great deal.

Lepore and Atkins also credit their law firm partners – at Day Pitney, Nukk-Freeman & Cerra and McGuireWoods — who have given their time and expertise to team up to help the veterans negotiate a frequently confusing legal system.

The clinic dovetails with VLJ’s own program for veterans, which addresses legal hurdles they encounter in obtaining employment, housing and financial stability.

“So many veterans have legal issues that hold them back from finding employment and housing, transitioning back into civilian life and moving on,” says Cathy Keenan, VLJ’s executive director.

She says veterans gain a great deal through the clinics – from finding a sympathetic ear to discovering the right legal path.

Lepore and Atkins say members of their legal teams gain a great deal as well, both personally and professionally. Lawyers and staff uniformly jump at the opportunity to serve at each clinic, solve the veterans’ legal issues and, by dealing with the underlying causes, help position them for future success.

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Attached are four photographs taken at the clinics:

1st photo, BASF VLJ-1 (pink hat in foreground):

From left: Cristina Baragona, compliance and employment counsel, BASF Corporation; Luke Pontier, associate, Day Pitney; and client with back to camera. (Photo credit: Photo courtesy of BASF)

2nd photo, BASF VLJ-2 (clipboard in foreground):

From left: Client and Ashleigh White, senior administrative associate, BASF Corporation. (Photo credit: Photo courtesy of BASF)

3rd photo, Panasonic VLJ-1 (blue cap in foreground):

From left: Brian L. Tremmer, associate, Nukk-Freeman & Cerra, P.C.; Ling-Ling Nie, assistant general counsel and chief compliance officer, Panasonic Corporation of North America Legal Department; and client. (Photo credit: Al Kruper/AK Photo)

4th photo, Panasonic VLJ-2 (red curtain in background):□

From left: Client (wearing hat); Philip Goldstein, partner, McGuireWoods; and Shaun Bean, senior counsel, Panasonic Corporation of North America Legal Department. (Photo credit: Stephen C. Weingarten/Panasonic)

About Volunteer Lawyers for Justice

VLJ, based in Newark, has provided pro bono legal services to thousands of economically disadvantaged clients since its creation in 2001. It offers assistance in the areas of bankruptcy, family law, consumer rights, education, landlord/tenant, veterans' matters, prisoner reentry, disaster response and human trafficking. Learn more about VLJ at www.vljinj.org.

About BASF Corporation

BASF Corporation, headquartered in Florham Park, New Jersey, is the North American affiliate of BASF SE, Ludwigshafen, Germany. BASF has more than 17,500 employees in North America, and had sales of \$16.2 billion in 2016. For more information about BASF's North American operations, visit www.basf.us.□

About Panasonic Corporation of North America

Newark, NJ-based Panasonic Corporation of North America is a leading technology partner and integrator to businesses, government agencies and consumers across the region. The company is the principal North American subsidiary of Osaka, Japan-based Panasonic Corporation and the hub of Panasonic's U.S. branding, marketing, sales, service and R&D operations. Panasonic was featured in *Fortune Magazine's* 2016 ranking of 50 companies that are changing the world and doing well by doing good. Learn more about Panasonic at us.panasonic.com/news.