



September 2017 Volunteer of the Month

Philadelphia VIP recognizes **Peter Newman** as our **Volunteer of the Month** for going above and beyond in answering the call to serve. Thank you, Peter!

Philadelphia has always been a city of homeowners, but the combination of the lingering impact of the Great Recession and rising gentrification pressures in many neighborhoods has made it increasingly difficult for low-income families to stay in their homes. Although Philadelphia's 52.6% homeownership rate exceeds that of other large cities, it was closer to 60% prior a decade ago ([Pew 2017 State of the City Report](#)).

In 2008, the [Mortgage Foreclosure Diversion Program](#) was created to provide a forum for homeowners to negotiate with lenders, enabling thousands to remain in their homes. The program has helped alleviate the overwhelming amount of foreclosure, but with the end of the federally-supported Home Affordable Modification Plan (HAMP), the need for pro bono legal assistance could become as urgent as it was during the recession.



Peter Newman, a partner at [Feldman, Shepherd, Wohlgernter, Tanner, Weinstock & Dodig, LLP](#), has been a Mortgage Foreclosure volunteer since 2008. "When people fell on hard times and lost their jobs during the recession, they were unable to make their mortgage payments," he says. "Through the City's diversion program, I met with clients to discuss their options and formulate a plan to save their homes from foreclosure."

Conciliation conferences have become a trademark of the diversion program. VIP Pro Bono Case Manager Isabelle Aubrun, meets with homeowners in court every Thursday and identifies a volunteer attorney to represent them. "Our goal is to help clients stay in their homes and prevent foreclosure," she says. "VIP volunteers are on-call to help." For the cases in which VIP volunteer attorneys have represented homeowners, approximately 75% of homes have been saved from foreclosure, compared to an overall diversion program save rate of 34%.

Peter has devoted the last decade of his pro bono work to this program, taking fifteen cases, and securing positive outcomes for his clients. At Feldman Shepherd, his practice focuses on catastrophic personal injury cases including medical malpractice, products liability, and complex personal injury and wrongful death actions. Though his VIP cases differ from his day-to-day practice, his firm enthusiastically supports his pro bono service. "From the beginning, Alan Feldman encouraged me to become involved in pro bono," says Peter. "He introduced me to VIP, and I joined the Board of Directors in 2006. Most of the attorneys at my firm have served, or currently serve, on the Board of a legal service organization," he explains.

During his Board tenure at VIP, Peter was Chair of the Fundraising Committee and focused on law firm outreach. Peter's service on VIP's Board was his entry point for taking on pro bono cases in a new area of law. He explains, "At first, I had this fear of practicing law in an area outside of my practice speciality. I had never dealt with mortgage foreclosure before, but I discovered the many resources VIP has available and the immense support the staff provides. I strongly encourage lawyers to take a VIP case, even if they are reluctant to try something outside of their comfort zone. VIP will be there to support you 100%."

Now, through VIP's mentorship program, Peter advises young lawyers on their VIP cases. "I've had the opportunity to give back with my time and my financial support," he says. "It's a wonderful opportunity to help someone in need. People aren't bad because they miss a mortgage payment; they just need a helping hand to get back on their feet. Saving homes stops the surge of abandoned properties, prevents homelessness, and reduces unemployment. It's good for the neighborhood, good for the city, and it feels good to help people in need who don't know how to negotiate with a lender or navigate the court system."

**Peter is a dedicated volunteer who is committed to helping his community.
We applaud his leadership and partnership in helping VIP achieve access to justice for all.**