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LAW SCHOOL NOTES

Center aims for practice-ready family law grads

DePaul fellows study financial, child abuse, elder care and LGBTQ issues of family law

BY LAUREN P. DUNCAN
Law Bulletin staff writer

In the 35 years since Donald C. Schiller co-founded the family law firm Schiller, DuCanto & Fleck LLP, he's seen an increase in law students wanting to pursue family law.

When Schiller first entered family law, it wasn't an area of practice many students set their sights on, he said.

Fast forward a few decades and today students are competing for spots in a family law center Schiller helped to form.

The Schiller DuCanto & Fleck Family Law Center at DePaul University College of Law was established in 2003 as a way to offer students experience working in family law during school and to meet the growing need for family lawyers.

In the 13 years since then, the center — which is supported in part by both Schiller and his firm — has been effective in preparing students to practice family law immediately upon graduation, Schiller said.

A part of that shift is in response to an increased demand for law students across all practices to be prepared to work immediately upon graduation, Schiller noted.

He added that students are also focusing on areas of practice while in school because they want to be work-ready.

"I think it's become more preva-

lent now that students want an identity so when they go for jobs they have something to bring to the table rather than just being bright students," Schiller said.

Students from around the country compete for the family law center's fellowships, which Schiller said has helped to bolster the reputation of the practice.

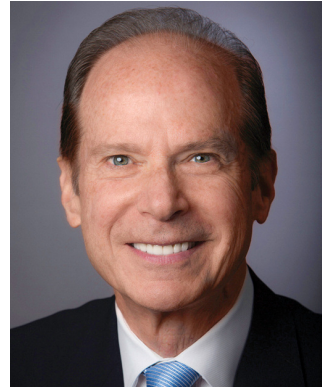
Cheryl D. Price, the center's executive director, said the organization selects 10 student fellows each year to place in internships the center pays for.

During the summer following their first year of law school, the fellows are placed in public sector internships. Students have the opportunity to work with judges, prosecutors and public defenders in domestic relations divisions in

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Cook and other area counties as well as in the Domestic Violence Legal Clinic's Self-Representation Assistance Program and other public offices that handle matters involving family law.

While the center is aimed at better preparing students for family law, both Price and Schiller said another center benefit is its effect on the community.



Donald C. Schiller

By providing students with internships in already cash-strapped public offices or through connecting students with pro bono services, Schiller said the center helps to meet the great demand of people who need the assistance of family lawyers. Schiller pointed out that the students also provide some relief to the courts.

"It's a fabulous opportunity for students and it's a great aid to the public because we're helping the judges gather information at virtually no cost to the county and helping the judges to make better decisions," Schiller said.

At the same time, Schiller said, the hands-on experience students are getting in a variety of family law matters is better preparing them for practicing straight out of school.

"It's wonderful the caliber of young associates that are joining law firms now. I think all around the

level of practice is much better than it was when I started," he said.

In addition to the internship opportunities in government offices, student fellows are able to seek internships in the private sector depending on their interests.

Price noted some of the center's other services include working with non-fellow students at the law school who are interested in



Cheryl D. Price

family law.

The center also hosts a variety of networking and educational events. Last year, the center hosted a symposium on alternative dispute resolution in child and family law cases.

Price said they hope to hold similar events in the future.

As far as the continued partnership between Schiller, DuCanto & Fleck and the center, Price said many of the firm's attorneys work closely in guiding the center both in its operations and in shaping the school's family law curriculum.

For example, Price said the school is working to establish a new class that addresses the financial aspects of divorce with the guidance of Schiller, who has noticed first-hand that there's a need for divorce lawyers coming out of school to have a better understanding tax returns, asset valuation and real estate matters.

Finance is just one of the many facets of family law — which range from juvenile justice and child abuse to elder law and LGBTQ issues — that Price said students must continue to stay up-to-date on in order to be ready to practice right out of school.

"Generally, students need to come out more practice-ready now than even just a couple of years ago because it's more competitive. It's hard to find jobs in law in general, not just family law," she said.

"That's just more pressure on students while they're in law school to be getting real hands-on, practical experience."

lduncan@lbp.com