Charleston attorneys assist 9/11 victims Charleston Post and Courier – September 11, 2003

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Local lawyers donate services to victim fund
BY TONY BARTELME
Of The Post and Courier Staff
Two years ago today, Kristen Fiedel, a young single mother from the Bronx, N.Y., was working in the financial department of Marsh & McLennan, on the 97th floor of the World Trade Center's Tower One.

Fiedel liked to chat with her co-workers about her daughter Lindsay, just 3 years old then. "She's so smart," she would say.

At 8:46 a.m., seconds after Fiedel finished a phone conversation with her mother, the first jet hit between the 93rd and 98th floors of the towers. Nearly 300 people from Marsh & McLennan's office died, including Fiedel.

Later, to help take care of Lindsay, the family sought help from the federal Victim Compensation Fund and eventually met two lawyers from Charleston, Paul Gibson and Wade Logan.

Gibson and Logan, along with several other local attorneys, had volunteered to give free legal help to people who lost loved ones in the attacks.

Over time, the two got to know Fiedel's family.

"Helping them is one of the most gratifying things I've done in the 24 years I've practiced law," Gibson said Wednesday.

Gibson and Logan's work was part of Trial Lawyers Care, the largest pro bono legal services program ever undertaken.

Created by the Association of Trial Lawyers of America, the effort has enlisted 942 lawyers from 45 states to help 1,500 victims free of charge.

The victim fund requires an extensive amount of paperwork leading up to a hearing that's similar to a trial, Gibson said. Analysis of a victim's salaries and income potential need to be done. Tax and life insurance issues must be taken into account. The initial claim form runs 33 pages.

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"You really have to be a lawyer to understand it all," Gibson said.

Gibson and Logan flew to New York several times to meet family members and gather information.

They enlisted the help of economists Oliver Wood Jr. of the University of South Carolina and Perry Woodside of the College of Charleston, who also agreed to work on victims' cases for free.

They represented the family in a proceeding in July to determine Lindsay's compensation. (They are awaiting the results.)

Along the way, they have watched the family grieve.

"On Memorial Day in 2002, they finally received a very small part of (Fiedel's) body," Gibson said. "In a way, it gave the family a lot of closure."

But two years later, with Lindsay entering kindergarten and taking ballet, the family still aches from her mother's absence.

"I think it affects them every day," Gibson said. "And anniversaries are really tough."

Fiedel's aunt, Marcia Costanzo, recently posted a letter to her niece on a Marsh & McLennan Web site.

"Hi again Kristen," she wrote, "so what did you think of Lindsay on her first day of Kindergarten? … Uncle Peter said when the bus pulled up at Mom's house, she looked just like you sitting in her seat."

Gibson said he heard about Trial Lawyers Care a few months after the attacks and gave a presentation about it to the local chapter of the American Board of Trial Advocates.

Several area attorneys signed up, including Richard Rosen, Johnny Linton, Mark Joye, John Tiller and Scott Palmer.

"We felt it was the least we could do," said Rosen, who along with Linton represented an emotionally handicapped man from Greenville whose mother was a cashier at Windows on the World, the restaurant at the top of Tower One.

Good deeds can have a ripple effect, and Linton said the work for the Sept. 11 victims was partly responsible for an idea he had to build an auditorium at Pinewood Preparatory School, a private school in Summerville.

Recently completed, it's called Freedom Hall. Inside are 14-foot murals depicting how civil rights activists, soldiers and others made sacrifices to preserve American freedoms.

"I got to thinking about the magnitude of the sacrifices people have made over the years,"

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Linton said. Helping the Sept. 11 victims “moved me in a big way.”

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