

TODAY'S BUSINESS

Bankruptcy clients get help

Bankruptcy lawyers are accustomed to fighting in court over how money should be paid to creditors in order for a person or company to get back to business.

Now, a charitable group — formed by those same attorneys — is setting its sights on helping debtors and other financially distressed people by giving out grants.

The New Jersey Bankruptcy Lawyers Foundation was incorporated earlier this month and is in the process of getting tax-exempt status, court papers show.

"Bankruptcy lawyers see all kinds of misery, emotional and financial, every day," said Gary Norgaard, a trustee of the new group. "We make our living from this system. . . . Not to give something back to the people in this system is repugnant."

Bankruptcy filings have reached historic proportions in the last few years. Nationwide, 1.6 million petitions were filed in bankruptcy courts last year. In New Jersey, more than 42,000 were filed, according to statistics from the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts.

The effort to reach out to the

community is part of a national trend in the bankruptcy courts. The National Conference of Bankruptcy Judges recently funded a video to teach high school and college students about the consequences of debt and irresponsible credit card use. The video and other programs have been used in Tennessee, Connecticut and New York.

Of the fleet of bankruptcy lawyers who practice in New Jersey, roughly 315 handle more than 500 pro bono cases each year, said officials.

The bankruptcy lawyers foundation, which has about 50 members, hasn't determined how it will make financial awards. They expect some grants will go directly to people to help pay security payments or bankruptcy filing fees. Other funds likely will go to legal aid and similar organizations. And some money will be used to educate the public about financial responsibility, Norgaard said.

The foundation's first fund-raising effort will be a golf tournament at Forsgate Country Club in Monroe Township in June. Organizers hope the event will raise about \$30,000.

Studying governance issues at Rutgers

A new center for institutional governance was formed at Rutgers University School of Law-Newark, officials announced.

The center will focus on governance issues not just facing corporations, but also nonprofits and small public entities, said law professor Greg Mark, who is running the center. Seminars, scholarly research and community outreach projects will examine the issues of transparency, accountability and effectiveness.

"All kinds of institutions share these kinds of problems. . . . What are the public expectations of how you create legal or other mechanisms to create the proper balance?" Mark said. He teaches corporate governance and business courses at the law school.

The center received \$26,000 in funding from the university and also has received funds from private donors and the alumni association.

Plans are under way for a conference next fall that would bring together the academic and business communities.

And finally . . .

Pitney, Hardin, Kipp & Szuch in Florham Park announced it has shortened its name to **Pitney Hardin**. . . . East Hanover native **Michelle Lee**, a student at American University's Washington College of Law, was part of a team that was named "best oralist" at the Saul Lefkowitz Eastern Regional Moot Court Competition in New York City. . . . The **Association of Trial Lawyers of America-New Jersey** yesterday honored two lawyers, **Leo Boyle** and **Larry Stewart**, who were the driving forces behind **Trial Lawyers Care**, a nonprofit group that provided free legal help to the victims of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. . . . **Executive Women of New Jersey** will honor **Geraldine Ponto**, a director of **Gibbons, Del Deo, Doan, Griffinger & Vecchione**, at its upcoming "Salute to the Policy Makers" gala in New Brunswick. . . . The **National Association for Law Placement** reports fall legal recruiting is up slightly (though not in the Northeast), but entry-level hiring has dipped.

— Kate Coscarelli