

2016 Citizen Lawyers: Nancy Black Norelli

By Jennifer Harrington

CHARLOTTE – “Nancy’s attitude is: if it should be done, it can be done.” That is how Ted Fillette of Legal Aid of North Carolina describes 2016 Citizen Lawyer Award Winner, Nancy Norelli. This sentiment was echoed by everyone interviewed for this article.

For almost forty years, Norelli has been using her time and many talents to make North Carolina a better place. Her resume is long and illustrious and worth the read. One of the efforts Norelli is proudest of took place this spring. A breast cancer survivor herself, Norelli put on her dancing shoes, learned swing with a professional dancer, and performed at the Charlotte Dancing with the Stars competition. She raised 46,000 dollars for Carolina Breast Friends. “Stepping out of my box and dancing in honor of my friends for a great cause was a real privilege.”

There is also her pro bono work. Norelli has done everything from obtaining tax exempt status for the Good Friends charity to getting a woman out of a predatory loan. She assists legal organizations with her creativity and skill. “Every meeting [Norelli has] a creative idea and then volunteers to follow through,” said Kenneth Schorr of Legal Services of Southern Piedmont. One of those ideas met a need as small but as fundamental as transportation, arranging for a Charlotte cab company to donate rides to lawyer meetings and court appearances for indigent clients.

Norelli also helped brainstorm, shape, and bring to fruition State Bar Journal’s dedicated Access to Justice issue. She came up with the idea, worked it through committee, and assisted the Access to Justice office with many details, according to Jennifer Lechner, Executive Director of the North Carolina Equal Access to Justice Commission.

Dedication and determination are not unusual for Norelli. Long-time mentor E. Osborne Ayscue described the Norelli-effect in a fundraiser for her District Court Campaign, saying “You are all here for the same reason that I am; no one has ever been able to say ‘No’ to Nancy Norelli.” It is true. During our interview, Norelli sought my donation for the North Carolina Access to Justice Campaign, laughing and saying “no one escapes my ask.”

Norelli is an unfailing role model for citizen lawyers, which means she never puts “lawyer” before “citizen.” “I never considered that community service was optional,” said Norelli. With ever-increasing issues impacting North Carolina citizens, what is Norelli’s secret? “I undertake things that are important to me, where I can make contribution.”

The Citizen Lawyer Committee of the NCBA Young Lawyers Division, in conjunction with the NCBA Citizen Lawyer Committee, provides expanded coverage of the 2016 Citizen Lawyer Awards in recognition of their volunteer service and leadership in their communities and beyond.

Jennifer Harrington is a law student at Washington and Lee University School of Law.