

## Student Loan Debt Creates Additional Challenges

### *PBF Programs Continue to Help Meet the Need*

*Jay Smith is a member of PBF's Board of Directors and Partner at Gilbert and Sackman in Los Angeles. He provided the following essay in response to a growing national concern.*

Unions have always relied upon modestly paid lawyers with top-level credentials and the Peggy Browning Fund has played a key role in recruiting and orienting gifted law students into a future in the labor movement. In recent years, the student loan crisis has made this work much more challenging. **It's increasingly urgent, then, that the PBF continue and expand its program to provide law students with real-world experiences working with unions, union law firms and worker centers, so that this crisis doesn't deplete the ranks of talented lawyers willing to join our movement.**

Most unions and union-side firms are able to pay first-year lawyers about \$75,000 per year. New lawyers at management-side firms earn between \$130,000 and \$180,000. This large income gap is not new, and it's not going to change given today's labor environment. But it's now more relevant because the student loan debt faced by the overwhelming majority of new lawyers has shot up so dramatically that



*Jay Smith, center, hosting 2017 PBF Summer Fellows and Alumni in Los Angeles at the fellows' orientation.*

we now face a new and large structural obstacle to recruiting lawyers to the labor movement.

Law school tuition has become astronomical, even in public universities. Students now routinely graduate with \$150,000 or more in student loan debt from law school tuition and fees alone, and the interest runs about seven per cent. Combined with undergraduate debt, some law graduates now face loan debt of several hundred thousand dollars.

Reports from around the country convey how talented new lawyers recruited by unions and union firms chose instead to work for public agencies or charitable non-profits in order to qualify for law

school loan forgiveness programs. One stated that "my student loan debt entirely drives my career decisions." Another said, "I sold out and worked corporate litigation for a few years to pay back loans before returning to the union fold."

**What to do?** One practical solution is to compress the salary progression for union lawyers, to allocate higher pay to first and early-year lawyers so they can afford to work with us. Some firms are already doing this.

A broader mission is to fight very hard for the return in this country to affordable higher education. Our civil society and our democracy may depend

*Continued on page 2*

*"What impressed me most this summer was the immense respect the attorneys and legal team at Levy Ratner had for their clients. No matter who they were talking to, the attorneys always treated clients, opposing counsel, union representatives, and employers with respect. That dedication inspired me to continue in labor law with immense respect for my clients, and I couldn't have been luckier than to work at a firm that set such a great example for me this early in my career."*

- Kelly Skahan, JD'18, University of Washington School of Law



# Margaret A. (Peggy) Browning

## *A Beacon for Workers' Rights*

Our namesake was, by all accounts, an exceptional person whose life and qualities left their mark upon the legal community and on the national scene. Born in Tennessee and educated at Swarthmore and the University of Pennsylvania Law School, Peggy was a creative and dynamic attorney.

While her name could have graced the masthead of any mega law firm, she chose to devote her energies to workers' rights. In her defense of workers' interests, she never lost a case in the Third Circuit Court of Appeals. Peggy was tirelessly focused on issues such as union representation, fair and equal pay and decent working conditions.

Her achievements strongly justified President Clinton's nomination of her as the first union-side lawyer in history to be appointed to the National Labor Relations Board.

The Peggy Browning Award is presented annually to social justice champions who have distinguished themselves with passion and dedication to the rights and needs of workers and their families.

### MISSION STATEMENT:

The Peggy Browning Fund educates and inspires the next generation of advocates for workplace justice. Through fellowships, workers' rights conferences, networking and other programs, the PBF provides unique opportunities for law students to work for economic and social justice.

*Continued from page 1*

on that. We should also demand that more law schools amend their loan forgiveness programs to recognize that union lawyering is public interest lawyering. The theme here is clear and compelling: we are the civil rights movement in the workplace and we need this help as much as any other public interest field. **Currently, only a handful of law schools have effective loan forgiveness programs that include unions and union law firms as eligible employers.**

Despite these obstacles, each year the Peggy Browning Fund sends its Summer Fellows and Alumni into union jobs, along with others who take jobs with different workplace justice employers. We have a proven approach, based on *first* exposing law students to the labor movement (often for the first time in their lives) and *then* encouraging them to forgo the salaries of lucrative law careers to join us in our work, even while struggling to pay staggering debt.

**Through annual Regional Workshops at law schools around the country, our national conference, and our core program of recruiting, placing, training and orienting Summer Fellows, the Peggy Browning Fund effectively conveys a compelling story.** That is how the American labor movement was created, and alone fights to preserve the middle class, the weekend, decent pay, health insurance, pensions, and civil and human rights in the workplace, and how it offers the only reliable means of achieving worker dignity and voice.

In short, the Peggy Browning Fund is successfully identifying and recruiting candidates into union law careers from a smaller pool of excellent new lawyers who can find a way to survive financially. **We can continue and expand this work only with your strong support. Clearly, it's more critically needed than ever.**

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# 19<sup>th</sup> National Law Students Workers' Rights Conference

*Inspirational and Energizing to a Growing Number of Students*

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*Keynote speaker Lynn Rhinehart, AFL-CIO*

Looking for encouragement in these very challenging times? How about this: 175 law students enthusiastic about workers' rights and social justice attended our conference this year, one of our largest groups ever.

In mid-October at the Maritime Conference Center near Baltimore, the Peggy Browning Fund once again brought together talented students from throughout the country to focus on workers' rights. On Friday evening, a panel of student leaders discussed their campaigns to organize graduate student workers. Many attendees lingered afterward, sharing information about their interests and getting to know each other better.

One of the event's highlights came on Saturday morning, with keynote speaker Lynn Rhinehart, General Counsel of the AFL-CIO. Her theme: *Why I'm in Labor Law and Why You Should Be Too*. Students found her realistic yet

*"Thank you for this opportunity! It seems not many law students, peers, people in general are aware of labor issues, workers' issues and the labor law field, so to be around like-minded students and professionals who genuinely want to help and donate their time is very encouraging, inspiring and lets us know we're not alone."*

- From a conference student attendee

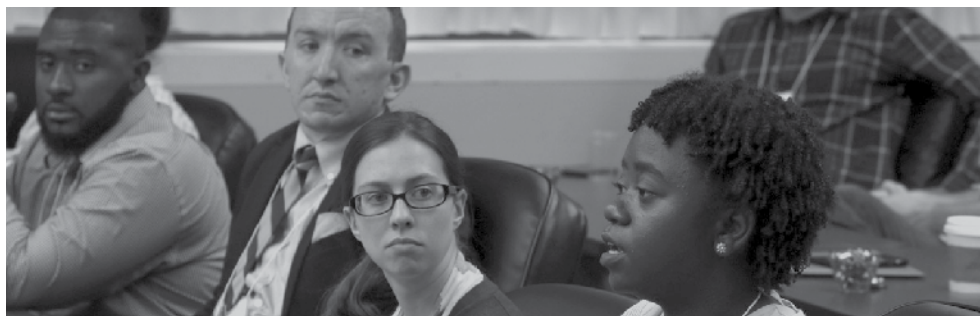
optimistic approach to be inspirational and energizing, as she stressed the need to take the long view and "to keep doing the work that working people are paying us to do," no matter how daunting the challenges.

Students repeatedly expressed their thanks for the opportunity to attend the conference. Sample comments from their feedback forms: **"I'm inspired. Looking forward to working in this area of law."** "The keynote speaker's energy was contagious and so uplifting!" Many expressed concerns about social justice issues and the lack of diversity in the labor movement. They asked for more attention to these topics in next year's conference.

One well-received workshop was The Rewards of Labor Law. Attendees found it a good introduction to labor

law practice and particularly liked the detailed suggestions given about items such as salary, billable hours, unique job searching tips, and similar topics. Half a dozen other workshops addressed a variety of topics – protecting and organizing immigrant workers, international trade and workers' rights, public sector labor law, sports and labor law, and ERISA.

The closing plenary session addressed a variety of current hot topics, ending with suggestions for what law students can do now. The answers? Join the picket lines, not just for labor but for other progressive causes too. Build coalitions. Pursue community volunteer opportunities. By getting involved in these ways, students can contribute their talents now and be better positioned for jobs after law school.



*Students participating in Conference Day workshops.*

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## 2017 Conference Sponsors

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# 2017 Fellow



*Eduardo Garcia*

**New Mexico  
Center on Law  
and Poverty  
Albuquerque, NM**

I've had a longstanding interest in working at the New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty. Thanks to my Peggy Browning Fellowship that became a reality. Under the direction of the labor team, I spent most of my time working on a voter initiative for earned sick leave to appear on the ballot for the upcoming municipal election. Additionally, I worked on a parallel suit to defend the minimum wage ordinance of 2012 from the attack of industry groups. I also assisted in creating educational outreach materials for agricultural workers not covered under New Mexico's Workers' Compensation Act.

**This fellowship was both challenging and filled with opportunities for learning. It was incredibly empowering to see both attorneys deliver passionate arguments in support of workers' rights. I learned from their preparation methodology and from their courtroom presence and delivery.**

I was tasked with researching rather complex and often unexplored areas of law where there was little or no case law to guide the court. Moreover, I worked on multiple writing assignments, which helped me sharpen both my legal writing and analysis. My supervising attorney offered candid advice and positive criticism to help me grow in this area. **I felt that I was genuinely part of a team and that my work, however modest, helped New Mexico's workers.** This opportunity reenergized me for my last year of law school and I remain resolute to pursue a legal career committed to workers' rights.



*Julie Pittman*

**Adelante Alabama  
Worker Center  
Birmingham, AL**

**My summer was action packed and such an incredible opportunity. I hope to return in the future to work with another worker center somewhere in the country.** In addition to a long-term research project investigating potential employment claims under Alabama state law, I participated in bi-weekly wage theft clinics. Through these clinics, I made phone calls to employers, supported several delegations to confront employers, and recently participated in a protest to claim unpaid wages in Centreville, Alabama, county seat of the widely popular podcast S•Town. I also developed a guide to litigating wage claims under Alabama state law, that will be a resource to other attorneys and worker advocates involved with the Wage Theft Clinic.

Because immigration status so often impacts workers' ability to successfully organize for better conditions, I also advocated for immigrants' rights on many different fronts. I drafted a response for evidence for a U visa application for a victim of an employment-related crime. I also drafted an ordinance to make Birmingham a sanctuary city, met with city councilors to present the ordinance, and supported a citywide March for Sanctuary as a legal observer. Finally, I participated in the #ShutDownEtowah campaign, in an ongoing effort to close one of the worst immigration detention centers in the country.



*Samantha Groark*

**Hammond &  
Shinners  
St. Louis, MO**

At Hammond & Shinners, I was able to work in many areas, including projects in all three of the firm's major practice areas: labor, ERISA and workers compensation. While I enjoyed the labor work the most, it was clear how all three were important for our union clients. Nearly all of the projects were research and writing intensive, which was great practice and meaningful work on real matters.

**Many of the projects were highly collaborative, involving many attorneys. This made for great feedback and interaction on the issues involved.**

I worked on the summer-long petition drive of the labor movement in Missouri. Our state successfully beat back the newly-enacted Right to Work law by collecting 310,567 signatures. Being part of this historic victory and marching at the Capitol when we submitted the signatures, was definitely the highlight of my summer!



*Summer Fellows at a Phillies game.*

# Highlights

*“The greatest epiphany that I had this summer was learning of the variety of creative ways that unions are seeking to organize new workers and industries. I was impressed with the energy and passion of the attorneys that I worked under, their constant drive to innovate in response to setbacks and push forward in ways that nobody has yet thought of. I’m more excited than ever to continue to be involved in this work as a labor lawyer.”*

- Joe Wright, JD’19, SEIU, Washington, DC



**Sarah Thompson**  
**Legal Aid at Work**  
**San Francisco, CA**

I applied for a fellowship at Legal Aid at Work because of the link between immigrants’ rights and workers’ rights. I wanted to get some experience in the substantive area of employment law in order to be able to provide more holistic legal services for my clients in the future. They do a mix of direct services work and litigation.

I participated in a weekly Workers’ Rights Clinic where we answered employment law questions with callers, supervised by attorneys. Every week we received training on a substantive area of employment law (i.e. discrimination, labor, paid leave, unemployment, disability, etc.) before the clinic.

Wage Theft Clinics were offered twice a month, which I attended, working on wage and hour-specific issues. I also had three in-person representation opportunities for a UI appeals hearing, a wage claim settlement conference at

the Labor Commission and a debtors’ exam, which ultimately did not take place because I negotiated the settlement by myself!

**I was given great supervision and included in all meetings so I really got to observe the nitty-gritty of their lives as workers’ rights attorneys.** I was also able to hone my skills in handling difficult clients. Although I don’t think I will practice in a jurisdiction with laws as pro-worker as California, it was a great place to cut my teeth. Thank you Peggy Browning!



*Summer Fellow Kathleen Beckett (right holding banner) at a CLEAN Carwash action in Los Angeles.*

*“Meeting so many New York State legislators, both in their offices and on the picket lines, was a highlight of my summer experiences. It was wonderful to have the opportunity to be involved in pushing a legislative agenda from the very beginning.”*

- Virginia Giannini, JD’19,  
Sheet Metal Workers Local 83

## Facts About the Peggy Browning Fund\*

**81** Fellowships in 2017  
**155** Participating Law Schools  
**63** Mentor Organizations  
**893** Total Fellowships Filled from 1998 – 2017

**Over 2,500** Students have attended PBF’s National LawStudents Workers’ Rights Conferences  
**68.8%** Alumni working for workers’ rights or other public interest organizations (of PBF alumni who have graduated from law school)

*\*As of press time*

# Washington, DC Awards Reception



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*(L to R) PBF Executive Director Mary Anne Moffa with awardees Bill Osborne, Larry Cohen, Jim Callahan, Kathy Krieger, George Murphy, Fred Feinstein and Joe Lurie*

The Peggy Browning Fund celebrated its 20th Anniversary by recognizing James T. Callahan, General President, Int'l Union of Operating Engineers and PBF Founding Advisory Board members on June 21st at the AFL-CIO. PBF's Founding Advisory Board members include Allison Beck, Laurence

Cohen, Fred Feinstein, Jonathan Hiatt, Kathy Krieger, Joe Lurie, George Murphy, Bill Osborne and Judy Scott. Samantha Duncan, a 2012 Summer Fellow at the United Auto Workers in Detroit, MI, shared her fellowship experiences.

# Washington, DC 2017 Reception Sponsors

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## Guardian

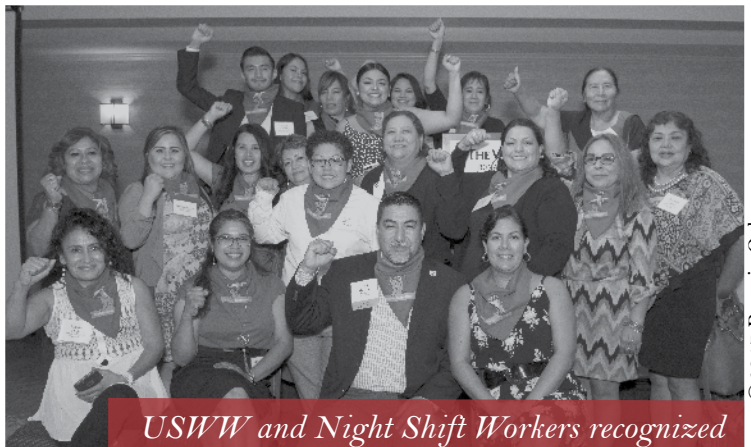
- IUOE Local 37
- IUOE Local 150
- IUOE Local 158
- IUOE Local 399
- Pitta, Bishop, Del Giorno & Giblin LLC

# Los Angeles Awards Reception

Si se Puede! Yes, we can! was the resounding theme throughout the Peggy Browning Fund's Los Angeles Awards Reception on September 14th. Members of the Port Drivers Teamster's Division and USWW's Night Shift Workers, were recognized for their significant organizing efforts and presented with the Peggy Browning Award.

Victor Narro, Project Director for the UCLA Labor Center and longtime organizer, was recognized along with David Huerta, President, and Sandra Diaz, VP Political Director, who accepted the Peggy Browning Award for awardee Alejandra Valles, Secretary Treasurer & Chief of Staff for United Service Workers West.

A brief video was shown in memory of former PBF awardee and USWW President Mike Garcia, who passed away earlier this year. Scott Sia, 2013 Peggy Browning Fellow at Gilbert and Sackman, shared his fellowship experience.



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*USWW and Night Shift Workers recognized at the Los Angeles Awards Reception.*

# Los Angeles 2017 Reception Sponsors

## Steward

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- SEIU USWW Children Over Politics

## Guardian

- Bush Gottlieb, a Law Corporation
- SEIU



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*Scott Sia, 2013 Summer Fellow at Gilbert and Sackman. He is now an attorney at The Wage Justice Center, in Los Angeles.*

# Alumni Spotlight

## Where are they today?

With over 800 Peggy Browning Fellowship Alumni, we strive to stay in contact with each and every one of them as they build their careers in the labor movement. One way that we keep those lines of communication open is through our Alumni Directory. A few times each year, we send update requests and many of our former Fellows, knowing how important it is to keep their networks going, submit an update to that directory which is then shared electronically with all of our alumni. Here are a few updates received recently:



**Ifeyinwa  
Oduunukwe,  
PBF'15**

During her undergraduate studies at Baylor University, Ify had the opportunity to work with at-risk high school students in low income districts who were having trouble passing the exam required to graduate from Texas schools. She also volunteered at an orphanage in Ghana and through Un Techo para mi Pais in Argentina (a youth-led non-profit organization present in Latin America and the Caribbean seeking to overcome poverty in slums.)

While at American University Washington College of Law, Ify volunteered in Colombia with Afro-Colombians who were displaced during the conflicts in the Dominican Republic, with Dominicans of Haitian descent who were discriminated against and unfairly deported, and low wage immigrants in Virginia and Boston to help reclaim their wages. **After her Fellowship at AFSCME, Ify completed her LLM in European Union Law, then graduated from law school and worked for AARP's Legal Counsel for the Elderly.**

Since moving to Dallas, she started an Immigration Law Practice and is currently working on an asylum case appeal.



**Ben Basil,  
PBF'09**

Ben comes from a working class family and knew from an early age that unions were important and that you have to fight for decent treatment at work. He was a union organizer before law school and he knew that he wanted to contribute to the labor movement. Ben attended the University of Louisville, Brandeis Law School in order to represent unions.

In 2009, Ben accepted a PBF Summer Fellowship with the Chicago Newspaper Guild. **He then landed his first job working for the UAW International Legal Department - a job he believes he would not have gotten without the Peggy Browning Fund.** Following graduation, Ben was fortunate to begin practicing with the premier union-side law firm in Kentucky - Priddy, Cutler, Naake & Meade PLLC, where he still practices today.

"I have been involved in both federal and state court challenges to Kentucky's recently passed "right-to-work" laws. I'm also very excited about my sixth year coaching the University of Louisville's Wagner Labor and Employment Law moot court team. We won the national championship in 2016 and are hoping to do it again!"



**Sarah David  
Heydemann,  
PBF'15**

Growing up, Sarah participated in women's rights and anti-war demonstrations that introduced her to the world of direct action. Then, as an undergraduate at Georgetown, she organized on campus to improve workers' wages and union contracts, experiencing firsthand how respect and dignity at work are essential building blocks for all other social justice endeavors. After graduation, she helped found Georgetown's first Center for Labor Research and then became an organizer with the National Guestworker Alliance in New Orleans.

In 2013, Sarah entered law school at Northeastern and accepted a PBF Fellowship at SEIU. **She credits her PBF fellowship with making the connections that have furthered her law career.** After law school Sarah worked as an associate at Cohen, Weiss and Simon, LLP in New York. More recently she became a legal fellow with the National Women's Law Center's Workplace Justice team, in Washington, DC. There she focuses on expanding awareness of legal protections for women workers; advocates for labor protections at the local, state and federal level; and participates in litigation aimed at enforcing and expanding women's rights at work. She is especially excited about the newly created Legal Network for Gender Equity—a nationwide network of attorneys that will undertake legal representation of girls and women experiencing harassment and sex discrimination. Sarah is an active member of PBF's Alumni Association chapters in NY and DC.



*The 2016 Wagner Labor and  
Employment Law Moot Court Team*

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## Upcoming Events – Mark Your Calendars

Join us as the Peggy Browning Award is presented to:



**James P. Connolly**  
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*of Chicago & Vicinity*



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**Craig Rosenbaum, Esq.**  
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*Chicago News Guild*

And Remember  
**Marvin Gittler**

**Tuesday, November 14, 2017**  
**The Drake Hotel**  
**140 East Walton Place, Chicago, IL 60611**

### 2017 Regional Workshop Schedule

- Sept. 25** Temple University Beasley School of Law
- Sept. 26** Southern University Law Center
- Oct. 3** University of Virginia School of Law
- Oct. 5** University of California  
Berkeley School of Law
- Oct. 10** University of Michigan Law School
- Oct. 11** Northeastern University School of Law  
University of Florida Levin College of Law
- Oct. 23** University of Southern California  
Gould School of Law
- Oct. 25** Rutgers School of Law, Camden  
University of Washington School of Law
- Oct. 30** UCLA School of Law
- Nov. 7** Rutgers School of Law, Newark
- Nov. 8** University of Pennsylvania School of Law
- Nov. 9** University of Wisconsin Law School
- Nov. 13** CUNY School of Law
- Nov. 14** Georgetown University Law Center
- Nov. 17** New York University School of Law

For more event information visit  
[www.peggybrowningfund.org/events](http://www.peggybrowningfund.org/events)  
 Or call 267-273-7994