

# 2010

## CORETTA SCOTT KING

### WOMEN FOR DIVERSITY AWARD WINNER



**PINA UGLIUZZA**

**BUILDING BRIDGES  
THROUGH  
TRANSLATION AND  
COMPASSION**

by Mikell Worley

**M**any of us have felt frustrated when dealing with the numerous documents and confusing forms required by insurance companies, healthcare providers, or other agencies for any given reason. Imagine dealing with that kind of administrative bureaucracy if you are living in a country where you are not fluent in the language or familiar with the culture. If your physical well-being, livelihood, and ability to provide for your family were threatened by an accident, work injury, or a disability, then frustration would rapidly change to panic.

Where would you turn for help? For some time now, thousands of people across Central Pennsylvania have turned to Pina Ugliuzza, director of Regional Development for Weinstein, Schleifer, and Kuper-smith (WSK), P.C., Attorneys at Law. The firm attributes its growth and successful business model to Pina's hard work and compassion.

In 1968, when Pina was 14 years old, Pina's parents traveled with her and her 12-year-old brother from Sicily, Italy, to the United States in search of new opportunities. "It was very hard, leaving our roots behind and trying to fit in," Pina reflects. She had studied English in school but still felt uncomfortable with the language barrier. "I slept with my English/Italian dictionary. It was my security blanket," she adds.

The family made its home in Reading, Berks County, where Pina attended St. Peter's Catholic School. "At first I wasn't able to keep up with my class and had to repeat the eighth grade. The sisters and teachers were very supportive. The next year, as my English improved, I won the award as the highest achiever of the class. My parents were very proud of me."

Pina's family lived in an Italian community that continued to grow because of the influx of immigrants to the area. They came because of the lack of industry and a decreasing job market in Italy. Yet when these Italians arrived in the United States, they encountered language barriers and cultural differences, and were unaware of their rights.

The young Pina made friends throughout her community and noticed that many of her neighbors needed help filling out legal and medical forms, applications for jobs, and school enrollment paperwork. Word soon spread that this young girl was a valuable resource and willing to help her friends and neighbors. "Pina can help you" was frequently heard throughout the Reading community.

Then in 1972, Pina met Alex Ugliuzza through friends of their families. They fell in love and were married two years later. Pina's marriage didn't end her concern for those in need, and she continued to take friends and neighbors to medical and legal appointments.

In 1983, Pina's work turned personal, when it was her father who needed her help. He was working at a local foundry when his leg was severely crushed. His employer provided little medical and disability coverage, so Pina began the long process of taking him to numerous medical appointments and seeking legal representation.

It was difficult to find a lawyer in Reading who would represent an injured immigrant without requiring a retainer. Fortunately, they found a firm in Philadelphia that took personal injury cases without an advance payment. David Weinstein, Esquire, founded the firm that took the case.

Time passed, and Pina continued to help Italian immigrants. She became very adept at it. In fact, she vividly remembers "sitting in a doctor's office with a Spanish social worker who worked for the local Hispanic Center doing the exact same thing that I was doing. She was amazed that I was a volunteer." Other than operating out of an office, Pina was doing the same job as the Spanish social worker.

All of that was about to change, recalls Pina, when in 1986, "Norman Weinstein and Chuck Schleifer, partners with the Weinstein Law Firm, called me to extend a job offer." Pina was to continue the work she was doing, only now she would earn a salary. "I met clients at my kitchen table. My outreach into the Italian community crossed over into the Latino community who embraced me and the package I was bringing."

As demand grew, the law firm opened new locations. The first regional office opened in Wyomissing in 1993, then in 1996, the office moved to downtown Reading. "As others were moving out of the city, we were moving in," Pina notes. "We wanted to be in the heart of the community."

By that time, Pina was handling the attorney/client communications and coordinating intakes and follow-up administrative duties for hundreds of cases. "We decided to hire a part-time employee from Nicaragua. She understood the culture of the community and WSK's clients." Currently, there are 45 employees at eight sites (Philadelphia, Reading, Lebanon, Lancaster, Kennett Square, Allentown, Harrisburg, and Delaware County) working to be "Your Bridge to Justice."

In 2008, Pina was directly involved in the decision to open a branch of WSK in Harrisburg. The attorneys of WSK volunteered to help create the new non-profit corporation named the Latino-Hispanic-American Community Center. Following Pina's example of direct community outreach and involvement, the law firm is actively providing professional legal assistance to Central Pennsylvanians with an emphasis on the Latino and Hispanic-American community.

Now working as director of Regional Development for WSK, Pina notes the services that the lawyers provide are still greatly needed. "During the last 40 years things haven't changed. Immigrants still fear the unknown. The lack of knowledge about their legal rights cause many to flounder in the system." WSK's business model that began in Pina's kitchen is best suited to help the immigrant community and all Pennsylvanians.

The decades of service that Pina has dedicated to helping others goes well beyond her language skills or her superlative knowledge of the law. The words "I want to help" are interwoven throughout her life story, and she treats everyone with empathy, compassion, and respect. ❖