

Duquesne Alumni Find Inner Reward by Helping Others

Tracy Carbasho, Contributing Writer

Mahatma Gandhi believed the best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others, and Mother Teresa noted, *“It’s not how much we give, but how much love we put into giving.”* Attorneys who earn their law degree from Duquesne University live up to these lofty expectations every day not only by taking on pro bono cases, but also by volunteering at nonprofit organizations, coordinating community services and starting projects to help individuals in need.

Jessica Tully, a 2008 School of Law graduate, overcame a humble family background and now lives her life according to the credo: “If you’re lucky enough to do well, it’s your responsibility to send the elevator back down.”

Tully is one of many law alumni who keep sending the elevator back down as part of their ingrained philosophy of helping others by giving back to their communities. A native of Cincinnati, Ohio, Tully began working on her first major community undertaking shortly after graduation. She and her husband, Jeff Fitch, formed F&T Property Management LLC in 2009 to help struggling residents in Elk County, Pa., purchase low-cost homes. The company bought homes from the Tax Claim Bureau’s repository list, made necessary repairs and sold them to residents for as little as \$3,500.

“My work with F&T has been the most rewarding. Since our buyers were able to purchase homes so inexpensively, they have had the opportunity to save money and use their savings to improve their lives,” she said. “Without a mortgage or rent payment, these families can survive on lower-paying jobs and still provide for their children in ways they may not have been able to do otherwise.”

Before moving to the Virgin Islands in 2016, Tully worked in Pennsylvania for an oil and gas title abstracting company and the law firms of Babst Calland Clements and Zomnir and Steptoe & Johnson. She also founded the firm of Tully & Barry just north of Pittsburgh in 2014.

Her community service work in Pittsburgh included encouraging students and their parents to strive for success by sharing her own story of overcoming poverty as part of her work with the Crossroads Foundation. She also worked on a pro bono basis in 2012 to help the Moraine Preservation Fund effectuate land transfers to Moraine State Park in Portersville, Pa.

In 2014, the Shenango Valley Chamber of Commerce presented her with a Top 40 Under 40 award for having a significant impact on the community.

Tully, a transactional attorney who focuses on real estate, property, energy, and oil and gas title matters, is now of counsel in the transactional department of Dudley, Topper and Feuerzeig in St. Thomas. She and her family evacuated the island before Hurricane Irma struck in September 2017. While they were away, they purchased supplies and shipped them to friends in St. Thomas for distribution to others. She hopes to perform pro bono work for the Virgin Islands Children’s Museum once it recovers from the hurricane and relocates to a new building.

“I was born poor, the oldest child of teenage parents, both from working-class backgrounds. I now have a successful law practice and live in the Caribbean. Statistically, this should not have happened,” said Tully. “Having moved through several social classes in my short life, I know the injustices faced by the poor. I have been lucky enough to do well and now it is my responsibility to send the elevator back down.”

“I have been lucky enough to do well and now it is my responsibility to send the elevator back down.”

— Jessica Tully, L’08

Tully