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Gifted attorney goes 'above and beyond'

BY LISA ROOSE-CHURCH • DAILY PRESS & ARGUS • OCTOBER 7, 2008

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Susan Spagnuolo-Dal, an attorney with Legal Services of South Central Michigan, laughs at a joke made by Brighton attorney Brian Lavan, whom Spagnuolo-Dal calls a mentor and friend. The State Bar of Michigan Representative Assembly recently named the 68-year-old Spagnuolo-Dal its "Unsung Hero" this year. (Photo by LISA ROOSE-CHURCH/DAILY PRESS & ARGUS)

ABOUT SUSAN SPAGNUOLO-DAL

Age: 68

Residence: Fowlerville

Family: Ten children; 14 grandchildren; two great-grandchildren

How you might know her: Attorney with Legal Services of South Central Michigan's Lansing office

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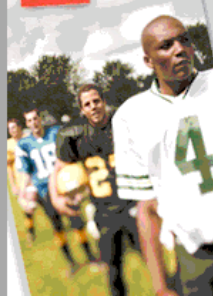
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Susan Spagnuolo-Dal is not afraid to make house calls.

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She has accompanied opposing counsel on home visits, given up time with her family — she is a mother to 10 children — and has gone out of her way to advocate for those who lack the means to protect their legal rights.

The 68-year-old Fowlerville woman has earned a reputation among the legal community as a straight-talking lawyer who treats others with dignity and respect.

Those are just some of the reasons the State Bar of Michigan Representative Assembly named her its "Unsung Hero" this year. She received the award at the organization's annual meeting Sept. 17-19 at the Hyatt Regency in Dearborn.

"I really love what I do," Spagnuolo-Dal said.

At first, Spagnuolo-Dal thought the letter announcing her award was fake and she wondered who sent it. When she realized it was real, she was pleasantly surprised and honored.

"We have a wonderful (attorney) bar here and bench and court personnel, and they picked me?" she said. "I did not have a clue I had been nominated. I was just so overwhelmed."

Bob Gardella, chairman of the Representative Assembly, said Spagnuolo-Dal's nomination letter was signed by many of her colleagues. Spagnuolo-Dal's knowledge of the legal system and her integrity are well-known in the legal community, he added.

"She goes above and beyond the call of duty," he said.

"She's dedicated her career to serving people who lack the means to protecting their legal rights," Gardella added. "She's a wonderful person. She deserves this award, and I'm happy that the Representative Assembly saw fit to award it to her."

Spagnuolo-Dal's career path to law was jagged.

She graduated from DeWitt High School at age 16 in 1957. She soon married and began a family while working in the family party store, Spagnuolo Confections; and teaching kindergarten and first grade at Fowlerville schools.

Her husband, the late Frank Spagnuolo, told her that she needed to become a lawyer.

"I was a freshman for 16 years at Michigan State (University). I was teaching; I kept having kids," she laughed. "I just kept going, one class at a time."

In those days, Spagnuolo-Dal said, women weren't allowed on campus if they were more than four months pregnant. Because Spagnuolo-Dal and her husband had 10 children, it took awhile to fulfill her graduation requirements.

She eventually earned her bachelor's degree from MSU in 1972 and her law degree from the University of Detroit in 1977. She then went to Bolivia until 1979 with eight children in tow to teach while her husband remained in Fowlerville, running the family store.

"I went to teach," Spagnuolo-Dal said. "I was bored ... and wanted something new."

She returned to Fowlerville, though, and passed the state bar in November 1979. She initially went into private practice with the late James Barley and Robert Cleave before finding a position in the late 1980s with the Oakland-Livingston Legal Aid, which eventually dissolved and became known as Legal Services of South Central Michigan.

"I love working with people; I love being around people," she said. "I love helping children learn and helping people who are suffering, who need help."

Contact Daily Press & Argus reporter Lisa Roose-Church at (517) 552-2846 or at lrchurch@gannett.com.

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bpbb1966 wrote:

I don't think she has changed all that much. Running a store and Frank and 8-9 then 10 kids and going to school on the side. She helped people back then employees became family. I am sure she couldn't even guess how many people they hired that truly needed a job. Continued to help them after they moved on to other jobs or towns. And believe or not sometimes they let lonely people help out and hang out (Wilbur) God Bless you Sue and Thanks for that job!

10/7/2008 9:53:12 PM

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BLONDEANDPOLISH wrote:

CONGRATULATIONS SUE!!! IT'S ABOUT TIME YOU WERE RECOGNIZED FOR ALL THE DEDICATION YOU HAVE GIVEN TO YOUR PROFESSION...YOUR HONESTY, LOYALTY, AND "OUTSPOKEN" MANNER, MAKES YOU A TRULY UNIQUE AND AWESOME MEMBER OF OUR COMMUNITY...MANY THANKS FOR YOUR YEARS OF DEDICATION TO THE LESS FORTUNATE...YOU'RE ONE IN A MILLION, LADY!!! NOBODY DESERVES THIS AWARD MORE THEN YOU!!!

10/7/2008 7:27:17 PM

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tjackson66 wrote:

CONGRATS Sue ! Your one of a kind !! I agree with Lighthouse we need more people like Sue in this world. She is well over due on this award.

10/7/2008 12:03:10 PM

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lighthouseanna wrote:

Congratulations Sue, we need far more Attorneys who would dedicate their time to provided justice to people who cannot afford to pay an attorney.

10/7/2008 8:09:24 AM

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livebyfaith wrote:

I appreciate Sue, she has more than once been willing to give advice !! I always knew that if I needed her I could call on her, and she would give me a straight out answer. God Bless you Sue. I APPRECIATE YOU!!!!

10/7/2008 4:34:59 AM

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