

Call it a banner (and bandana)

Legal Rebels year. And talk about accomplishments: This year's 13 Rebels are providing new ways to help immigrants find legal assistance, businesses comply with accessibility laws, drivers deal with parking tickets, and lawyers do their time and billing—painlessly.

One Rebel rose from a devastating family health issue to provide legal services for firms that hire people with criminal records. One uses her experience as a “Deafblind” woman to teach firms how to work with employees who have disabilities. One lives on friends’ couches to keep down expenses as her litigation management business takes off.

We also feature a professor handling a program that combines lawyers, business students and STEM entrepreneurs to grow projects from idea to product; two women whose legal service helps lawyers and law firms find pro bono projects; a crew using artificial intelligence to augment legal research; and a lawyer/IT director whose work has affected criminal record expungement, bail reform and class action work.

It's an extraordinary list of people improving access to justice, helping lawyers work more efficiently and providing service to society.

Check out their miniprofiles in the pages ahead, written by Terry Carter, Lorelei Laird, Victor Li, Jason Tashea and Stephanie Francis Ward. Read more details about these efforts at ABAJournal.com/legalrebels.

While you're there, check out our past Rebels, find (or add) some legal practice strategies, read fresh ideas provided by our New Normal contributors and listen to podcasts, including our latest Trailblazer series speaking with the daring doers who were changing law practice before Legal Rebels began.

Pablo Arredondo, Jake Heller and Laura Safdie of Casetext created a tech tool to help lawyers function more effectively.



THEIR AI ASSISTANT IS FREEING UP LEGAL RESEARCH

When it comes to information, Casetext CEO Jake Heller, 32, thinks the open-sourced and open-knowledge movement can be the great equalizer.

So he launched the company in 2013. Similar to crowd-sourced sites such as Wikipedia, Casetext relies on users to provide annotations, descriptions, references and tags for cases and statutes. Three years later, Casetext added the

Case Analysis Research Assistant, an artificial intelligence researcher, something that lawyers had told him was impossible.

But Casetext's vice president, Pablo Arredondo, 38, thought it was. "I had previously worked in patent law," he says. "What I realized was that companies such as Apple or Google had tools that were innovative and beautiful. But the tools used by their outside counsel were not."

For the company's chief operating officer, Laura Safdie, 32, its main mission is to give lawyers tools to enable them to function more effectively.

"All of our ideas come from people who tell us things like: 'I used to hate doing that when I practiced law' or 'I wish I had that when I was practicing law,'" she says.

—Victor Li

PHOTOGRAPH BY TONY AVELAR

PATTERN OF PROGRESS

Leading the Way for People with Disabilities

Haben Girma, a Harvard Law School graduate, has limited hearing and vision and refers to herself as “Deafblind.” “It should be one word, no hyphen, and I prefer to capitalize the D because it’s a cultural identity,” says Girma, 29, a former Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom fellow whose work centers on consulting and public speaking about the benefits of fully accessible products and services, as well as hiring people with disabilities. Before she went into consulting, she practiced litigation for 2½ years with the nonprofit Disability Rights Advocates and represented the National Federation of the Blind in an accessibility lawsuit brought against Scribd, a digital library subscription service. The case settled in 2015 after the company lost its summary judgment motion in the U.S. District Court for the District of Vermont. “Litigation is powerful, but I feel like a lot of the accessibility barriers are due to lack of education,” Girma says. “I feel like I have a unique talent to inspire and motivate people to remove those barriers.”

—Stephanie Francis Ward



PHOTOGRAPHS BY TONY AVELAR, COURTESY OF PALADIN



HELPING FIND PRO BONO THAT FITS

Felicity Conrad and Kristen Soday met at Gratitude Migration, a New Jersey Shore art and global music festival.

But rather than focusing on the festivities, they spent most of the evening talking about a pro bono asylum case Conrad had recently won for a South American man and how technology could amplify social justice.

Conrad, 28, had recently left an associate position with Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, where she practiced international litigation and arbitration.

“I was working at the time at a hedge fund and was itching to get back in a startup. I had just wrapped up my role at Grouper,” says Soday, 30, referring to the former social club app that paired groups of friends for drinks. Soday previously worked as its director of international operations.

This year, the pair launched Paladin, a platform that helps organizations manage, staff and track pro bono efforts.

“Our platform makes sure that the right attorneys are seeing the right opportunities,” says Conrad, who is the CEO. The service started in New York City, Baltimore, San Francisco and Chicago and is now available across the country, says Soday, the chief operating officer.

“Learning about the nuances related to pro bono has been fascinating to me,” Soday says.

—S.F.W.

His ‘Chat’ Is Not Just Talk

Joshua Browder, a 20-year-old London native, is a self-described terrible driver who took action on his ton of traffic tickets—and created an online application that is providing legal help far beyond the highway.

He spent the summer before he enrolled at Stanford University in 2015 working on DoNotPay, an Android app and legal chatbot that assists motorists in challenging their traffic tickets.

Browder says DoNotPay has overturned more than 375,000 tickets. But he didn’t stop there. Last August, he modified his chatbot to help the homeless in the U.K. apply for public housing.

In March, DoNotPay began to help refugees file applications for asylum in the United States, the U.K. and Canada.

“Only a couple hundred people have used it,” Browder says. “While that’s many orders of magnitude smaller than the parking ticket bot, [the refugee issue] is much more important.”

And in mid-July, Browder announced that the legal chatbot will cover nearly 1,000 additional legal areas, including consumer rights, employment law and landlord-tenant disputes.

“I still like the name DoNotPay,” says Browder, recognizing that his creation has moved far away from its original incarnation. “Maybe I’ll change it to DoNotPay Lawyers.”

—V.L.





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Teaching Startup Law as Startup Products Start Up

From the late 1980s to mid-2000s, Cornell Law School professor Charles Kenji “Chuck” Whitehead was steeped in BigLaw securities and deals work. He also had top leadership positions as a hybrid banker and a lawyer in big finance companies involved in venture capital and securities.

Then he decided to do what he had an eye on years earlier as a student at Columbia Law School—teach.

Now, Whitehead, 55, has put his nonacademic experience to even greater use, bringing LLM students into the mix last year at Cornell Tech, a New York City-based, Silicon Valley-style incubator in technology and entrepreneurship. Cornell Tech already had advanced

students in business, computer science and engineering, as well as experience in wielding big data in analytics and machine learning.

The program has its law students advising on startup products and participating in their development. His inaugural class of 12 LLM students graduated in May. Whitehead says he selected that dozen from about 100 formal applications.

Prospects get two questions 24 hours in advance—one is hypothetical and the other is to pitch their own startup concept.

“It’s not to see what they know but how they work under pressure when pushed with questions,” he says. “It’s a skill you pick up as an in-house lawyer.” —T.C.

Keeping Time So You Don’t Have To

Ryan Alshak and some friends developed a great app that involves digital profiles. But no one was going to beat down any doors to get it.

“We had a cool product but not a business,” Alshak says. The answer, he realized, was in an adage: The biggest problems are the biggest business opportunities. Alshak, then a second-year associate at Manatt, Phelps & Phillips in Los Angeles, contemplated what he liked least about law practice: keeping time sheets. He checked with about 20 colleagues and keeping time kept coming up.

Alshak, 30, left the firm in April 2016 to pursue that business opportunity. The result is Ping, an automated timekeeping program that has promise for radically changing how BigLaw lawyers keep track of their billable minutes—more precisely, eliminating the bother. All the apps, programs and devices lawyers use, from Microsoft Word to Excel and browsing the web to talking on the phone, would feed into a log of what has been done on what matter for what client and for how long.

As far as a goal of handling 100 percent of billing, just how far Ping might get is an open question. “Some lawyers have asked if we could account for thinking about a case in the shower,” Alshak says. “We’re not going to plant a chip in the brain.” —Terry Carter

COUCH SURFER STAYS ON TRACK FOR CEO SUCCESS

Barreling toward partner track at Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher in New York City, Alma Asay took an abrupt exit to start a legal technology company.

“It surprised me how much I loved my job” at Gibson Dunn, says Asay, 35. However, she recalls thinking in February 2012: “If I was ever going to try anything else, it should be now.”

Today, she is the founder and CEO of Allegory Law, a litigation management software company.

With no permanent home address, Asay has been staying

on couches of friends and family to extend her financial runway.

Allegory is a platform that helps prepare evidence, build binders and manage depositions while cross-referencing every aspect of a case.

Allegory’s genesis was a series of spreadsheets that Asay made as an associate under the tutelage of Orin Snyder, a Gibson Dunn partner. Asay’s early spreadsheets “mapped the case in a way that was simple, transparent and accessible,” Snyder says. Asay’s “ability to put together disparate parts of a case was

her talent,” Snyder says, and that’s why Allegory works.

Asay’s ideal outcome for Allegory is to scale through partnerships. “I think Allegory can be really powerful teamed up with a larger company,” she says.

Snyder thinks Asay either will be Allegory’s successful CEO or an acquired CEO looking for her next challenge. “Either way, she’ll be rich,” Snyder says. —Jason Tashea



NEGOTIATING BETTER ACCESS FOR THE DISABLED

Compliance is a frequently used word in legal matters related to the Americans with Disabilities Act. But Lainey Feingold says simply meeting the law's standard is not enough.

"It's about integrating technology, web development and usability," says the Berkeley, California, sole practitioner, whose work centers on digital accessibility for people who are blind. "When technology becomes a compliance issue, our creativity is lost, our enthusiasm is lost, and things get stuck in the law office."

Rather than litigation, Feingold finds solutions through structured negotiation, a collaborative dispute resolution method. Businesses like it because the process is cheaper and often faster than litigation, she says. Also—because the settlement agreements always include extensive product testing, input and feedback by people who are blind—it works better for her clients.

The law firm of Goldstein, Borgen, Dardarian & Ho brought in Feingold,

61, to work on a matter after a blind lawyer approached the firm about there being no accessible ATMs.

Feingold contacted CitiBank in 1995, and a preliminary agreement was reached in 1999, with terms that included the ATMs being equipped with text-to-speech screen readers. The final agreement was entered in 2001.

Similar agreements regarding talking ATMs were reached with other financial institutions, including Bank of America and Wells Fargo. Those discussions led to structured negotiations that involved online banking accessibility, Feingold says.

If a business needs time to get resources together and systems in place, Feingold is understanding, according to Susan Mazrui, AT&T's director of public policy. But when it's an issue in which the business is unresponsive, the lawyer will respond accordingly.

"Because she is so kind and gentle, they don't know she is brilliant and fierce," Mazrui says. —S.F.W.

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CREATING TECH SOLUTIONS TO INCREASE JUSTICE

Matthew Stubenberg's legal career is shaped by the Great Recession.

In 2010, he started law school at the University of Maryland, where he "fell in love with criminal defense." However, upon graduation in 2013, the legal market was still recovering, and he was without a job. That was when Stubenberg learned how to code.

Inspired by his law school clerkship, Stubenberg, 29, wanted to help attorneys navigate Maryland's courthouses. He learned the programming language Java and created Not Guilty, a smartphone app that digitized the paper documents with judges' information.

Now the IT director at the Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service, he creates scalable solutions to chronic problems faced by underfunded legal aid and criminal justice programs.

Since 2015, Stubenberg has operated the website MDExpungement, which informs a user whether their case is expungable and auto-populates appropriate court forms. The tool has created more than 33,000 expungement filings and generated enough filing fee waivers to save Marylanders \$756,600, he says.

And to improve the efficiency and scope of MDExpungement, he created the Client Legal Utility Engine, or CLUE, a database from public court documents with 7.5 million civil and criminal cases that date back to the 1980s.

With increased technical savvy, Stubenberg says his optimism for creating in the legal tech space has grown.

"One thing I believed when I first started in legal tech was that many of the good ideas had already been taken," Stubenberg says. He now says that the area is still new, and "a majority of the good ideas have yet to be conceptualized."

—J.T.

MAKING THE SYSTEM WORK FOR MODEST-MEANS CLIENTS

Mindy Yocum was the mother of a 2-year-old, with another child on the way, when she got the worst kind of news. Her husband, Scott, was closing up at work when three men broke in, stabbed him nearly 30 times, cleaned out the cash register and cut the phone lines.

He survived—but that's when their legal troubles began. The workers' compensation insurer insisted that he go back to work in a week, which was not medically possible. Their first lawyer did nothing to help, and 18 months went by before they hired a second, who did secure a settlement.

Then the whole process started over again with Social Security Disability Insurance, which took five years to grant

his benefits. The family lost its home, health insurance and more.

The experience turned Yocum into an informal advocate for families in situations such as hers. But she needed more.

"I realized that I need a bigger voice and decided to one day run for office and go to law school," says Yocum, 42. "I knew that I could do more to help more people that way."

The Yocum Law Office opened its doors just outside Columbus, Ohio, in 2015, providing legal services aimed at people of modest means. In particular, Yocum offers legal services as an employment benefit,

partnering with organizations that employ or serve people who have a legal barrier to employment, such as a criminal record. Services include on-site workshops, one-on-one counseling, and flat-fee legal services for those who need more.

Yocum says small-business accelerator SEA Change helped her develop her business model. But she also got help learning to run a law practice from the Columbus Bar Association's incubator program, Columbus Bar Inc., which gave her 15 months to "make mistakes and have people support you through it."

—Lorelei Laird