

## Member Spotlight: Attorney Victoria de Toledo

*Member Spotlight is an ongoing forum for recognizing the important contributions of CWEALF members in the legal and civil rights communities.*

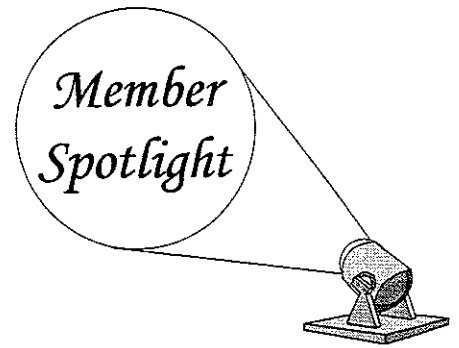
This month, CWEALF highlights the work and dedication of Attorney Victoria de Toledo. De Toledo was recently featured in *The Connecticut Law Tribune* for her work as attorney for the plaintiff in *Murphy v. Burgess*. CWEALF has a special interest in this case because it deals with liability in sexual harassment cases. At stake in *Murphy* is whether or not individuals can be held liable for harassment. Under current interpretations, employers are held responsible for any sexual harassment by employees who work in supervisory positions. In the *Law Tribune*, U.S. District Judge Alan H. Nevas, who ruled on motions to dismiss filed by Burgess, is quoted as saying that the Connecticut Fair Employment Practices Act (CFEPA)'s discrimination and sexual harassment provisions are "intended to impose individual liability on supervisors such as Burgess who hold positions of power, control and authority, and who use that power, control and authority to engage in the conduct giving rise to a discrimination claim."

Attorney de Toledo stated in the article, "We do not have the ability to hold individuals responsible for the actions on the federal front, and we really didn't know if we had that ability on the state front." She then added, "And now, Judge Nevas has become the first district judge to determine that we definitely can hold an individual responsible." *Murphy v. Burgess* is especially important to CWEALF which provides sexual harassment education to employers and employees.

In her interview for CWEALF's *Member Spotlight*, Attorney de Toledo spoke of her early years as a lawyer when she believed that "one could change the world by only taking big steps." She then had the opportunity to take an employment discrimination case that involved an older man. According to de Toledo, her client was losing his self-esteem, and he began to believe the negative statements his employers were making about him. Ultimately, the case was decided in favor of her client. But, de Toledo says, "What was most important for me that this individual felt whole again." She added



that "the whole experience was truly uplifting because the law had a very personal impact on my client's life." Although the win did not have a systemic



legal impact, de Toledo realized that she had helped a man regain his sense of dignity and pride. "Unfortunately," she continued, "many people do not see the law making such positive changes."

According to de Toledo, those small changes in the large scheme of life make the real difference. Or, in her words, "A pebble that is skimmed across the water can make more ripples than one huge boulder that is thrown in."

Attorney de Toledo became an admirer of what she calls CWEALF's "holistic approach" to women's education and legal rights and became a member in 1992. She said that CWEALF's work is inclusive in that it provides services for all women and that CWEALF projects and programs address a wide variety of issues that affect women.

Laws which prohibit employment discrimination are extremely important to Attorney de Toledo who has practiced law for 16 years in the law firm of Casper & de Toledo in Stamford, Connecticut. She received her law degree from New York University in 1981. Although Attorney de Toledo practices primarily in employment and labor law areas, she also handles personal injury and divorce litigation.

Currently, de Toledo is President of the Connecticut Employment Lawyers Association (CELA). As one of CELA's

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founding members, de Toledo has become a catalyst for its mission to help further and refine the laws of employment discrimination. She has lectured frequently for the Connecticut Bar Association, the Connecticut Trial Lawyers Association, the National Employment Lawyers Association and trade associations. She is a commentator for Court TV and is listed in Best Lawyers in America. She has also authored several published articles on sexual harassment and trial practice.

Attorney de Toledo says that she follows the principle "Do unto others as they would do unto you" in the workplace and at home with "her partner and mate," Stewart Casper and their twin eight-year olds. This view shapes the way that she sees a lawyer's responsibility. She adds, "A lawyer is not only someone's legal representation, but a lawyer is a counselor, someone who will be there to listen when they are in legal difficulties. Being a guide through the legal system, and treating clients with kindness and respect makes the job a fulfilling and rewarding experience." CWEALF salutes Attorney de Toledo's work in the area of employment law and appreciates her support of our efforts.