

Two Alums Honored as Outstanding Young Lawyers by the New Jersey State Bar Association

Bobby Conner '06, open governance attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey, and Melissa Gertz '05, executive director of the Community Justice Center, were recently honored by the Young Lawyers Division of the New Jersey State Bar Association. "Dynamic young lawyers like this year's honorees," said NJSBA immediate past president Allen A. Etish, "are the future of this profession."

Conner, who has led the ACLU-NJ's Open Governance Project since its launch last year, received the group's Professional Achievement Award. "In just four years out of law school," said ACLU-NJ deputy legal director Jeanne LoCicero, "Conner has not only become a leading advocate in the field of open government, but has also shined professionally as a creative colleague who holds himself to the highest standards."

According to the ACLU-NJ press release, Conner has made numerous contributions to the growing body of public records decisional law. For example, he successfully argued that police use-of-force reports are not exempt from public access, persuaded Union County freeholders to issue a public apology to a resident they had silenced because of a disagreement over his comments, and wrote the amicus brief in *Burnett v. Gloucester*, helping to ensure that public documents maintained by a third party can't be shielded from the public. "When we fight for open government in one jurisdiction," said Conner, "we send a message to every official in New Jersey: If you obstruct the public from access to records or meetings, you will hear from the ACLU."

Gertz earned the Service to the Community Award for her work as co-founder and executive director of the Community Justice Center in Trenton. CJC provides free or low-cost legal services to eligible disabled veterans and non-veterans. In an interview with the *Trenton Times* (May 27, 2010), Gertz said: "We can help our clients with the maze of paperwork to get through the system. They need to concentrate on what's really important – struggle towards improved health, well-being, recovery and stability."

Christina Vassiliou Harvey '04, chair of the Young Lawyers Division, noted that, despite being disabled herself, "Melissa raised funds for the non-profit and turned it into a successful entity. She has a full caseload and speaks on panels on veterans' rights." CJC has resolved 20 cases and has 120 clients with open cases. Gertz, who was very active in public interest activities while at Rutgers Law School, still suffers from injuries from a near-fatal car accident during her summer internship at the Mississippi Workers' Center for Human Rights.

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