

Encore

Amy B. Ginensky's second act

BY JESSICA GLYNN

Shortly after Philadelphia lawyer Amy B. Ginensky left her post as head of commercial litigation at Pepper Hamilton, she was serving on a committee on how to transition a practice at retirement. She was also well-aware that she was one of 60 lawyers over 60 at her firm.

Ginensky didn't want to talk just about transition—she wanted to talk about the future. She kept coming back to Marc Freedman's *Encore*, a book about second acts and the potential of the senior workforce to better the world. It gave her the idea to bring together her peers to do just that.

"I had the best practice," she says of her First Amendment work. "But I always thought I wanted to do something in addition to what I had done for 40 years."

So in 2015, the Pepper Center for Public Service, part of Pepper Hamilton (now Troutman Pepper), was born. Its mission: serve as a nonpartisan organization that draws on the talents of the firm's retired partners and senior attorneys to wrestle with problems facing local communities. More than 35 fellows and one non-lawyer, former *Philadelphia Daily News* editor Michael Days, support the center.

Ginensky, the center's unpaid president and CEO, lights up as she talks about it.

"I love that I don't get paid for it, it's very liberating," she says. "I love that we can choose what we want to do. I love that we're doing things that are making a difference in people's lives, and in our lives, too. There's nothing exactly like this that I know of."

For the center's first few years, the focus was learning not only where they could have an impact, but also about each other. "We are a large firm, and everybody was in their silos," she says. "By the time you become senior partner, you're head of your silo and you're mostly not working with your co-60-year-olds."

Yet that's just what they did. At meetings, they used their own networks to bring in high-profile speakers, like



The Pepper Center fellows with Gov. Tom Wolf.

Gov. Tom Wolf, the School District of Philadelphia's superintendent, and organization leaders and policy experts.

"We didn't know where we were going," Ginensky says. "What we did know is we wanted to help meet an unmet need. And the work didn't have to be all 'legal work.'"

That first need they saw was immigration. A dozen of the center's lawyers focused on a York County detention center where there were no pro bono lawyers representing detainees for bond hearings. While none of the lawyers spoke Spanish and only one had immigration experience, they called in an assist from multilingual Penn Law students and the Pennsylvania Immigration Resource Center.

Beginning in 2017, they donated thousands of hours and saw some 30 clients released on bond—including a Haitian activist fleeing political persecution, and a woman from Paraguay seeking protection from her abusive husband. The center has since handled 100 immigration cases with Penn Law students and Troutman Pepper associates, including a Third Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals decision that the Board of Immigration Appeals had exceeded its authority in reversing relief for a client who fled gang-inflicted sexual violence and harassment in Guatemala.

While stuck in their homes during the pandemic, the fellows set their eyes on voting rights and worked in tandem with the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights (LCCR) leading up to the 2020 election.



Amy Ginensky

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The center, working with lawyers at Troutman Pepper and Blank Rome, took over the Pennsylvania portion of the LCCR hotline, which was overrun with calls about mail-in voting. The center helped recruit and train 350 lawyers who answered 2,500 calls just on election day.

"It was a lot of flying while building the plane," Ginensky says of giving real-time directions to a voter looking for a ballot place, or texting a caller his registration number just in time before polls closed. "It really does make a difference, and now we're doing Pennsylvania [elections] forever."

Next up is working with the School District of Philadelphia on a law and justice mentoring program, which they're piloting at Kensington Health Sciences Academy with 10 weeks of expert speakers on topics like gun violence, access to healthcare and immigration.

"Often the process [of figuring it out] is messy," she says. "And at the same time, deeply rewarding. I think all of us would say we have benefited and grown."

She's hoping her idea will spark others. "This is not proprietary," she says. "The more people, the more firms, who do things like this, the more potential there is for putting the great resource of senior minds to use for good." **SL**