

May 2023

Memorial Day Newsletter



Veterans Clinic
School of Law
University of Missouri

New

A Message from the Clinic Founder

This note is bittersweet because it is my last newsletter message for the Veterans Clinic. I am very excited to start enjoying retirement at the end of the year! The Clinic has truly been an exceptional part of my life and I will be forever grateful to all of the friends, colleagues, students and veterans who made the journey so rich. I often hear people say, “I have no words,” and now I fully understand the phrase. There is simply no way I can acknowledge each person who supported my efforts and the Clinic’s work over the past ten years. Suffice it to say, it was an extraordinary time because of the people I encountered. I will cherish many, many fond memories as I swing wildly on the golf course.

I am completely at peace with the decision to retire because Brent Filbert is in place and more than ready to lead the charge. Brent is, unquestionably, the finest candidate we could have found to direct the Clinic’s work in the future. Brent’s high level litigation background (including work in toxic torts) and his honorable military service in the Navy JAG Corps are most certainly impressive credentials. And, Brent’s earlier work in the Clinic — from 2018 to 2021 — is a great harbinger of future success. Brent’s past work in the Clinic led to an entirely new branch of substantive work (discharge upgrades) and increased the Clinic’s financial footing exponentially. We are still benefiting from the work he did five years ago.

In short, Brent has a proven and successful track record. That he is a true son of Mizzou is the frosting on the cake. His father, Gary Filbert, is a Mizzou legend, having coached with Norm Stewart and founded the Show-Me State Games. Brent’s children, like Brent and his twin, are University of Missouri alums. To be sure, Brent’s commitment to both Mizzou and the Clinic is genuine.

Lawyers are not in the business of making guarantees, but I am completely confident the Clinic will reach new heights under Brent’s dedicated direction. I’m looking forward to watching from the sidelines and I trust you will be cheering him on with me!

A Message from the Clinic Director

I am honored and fortunate to take over from Angela as the Veterans Clinic Director. Ten years ago, she started the Clinic from nothing and has built it into one of the premier veteran legal clinics in the nation. So, I have big shoes to fill for sure, but I know the Clinic is on firm footing and ready to reach new heights. I will strive everyday to increase the Clinic’s capacity to help veterans and to educate law students. My goal is to one day never have the Clinic turn away a deserving veteran due to lack of capacity. This will require a unyielding commitment to the success of the Clinic and the veterans we serve. We will do so in an enthusiastic and humble manner on behalf of a grateful nation.



Angela Drake, Founder of the Veterans Clinic



Brent Filbert, Director of the Veterans Clinic

sletter



Putting Your Money Where Your Mouth Is

Private support is vital to continuing the Veterans Clinic mission of helping veterans

“Thank you for your service.”

A phrase used across America to veterans and current members of the military to express gratitude for the sacrifice made for our country. Jane and Roger Harris decided they wanted to do more. And do more they did. This spring, the Harrisese gave \$500,000 to the MU Veterans Clinic with the confidence that their generosity would directly benefit veterans.

“We hear [‘Thank you for our service’] too much, including from me!” Jane Harris said. “It made me feel good that we’re [doing] more than lip service and have contributed more than just words. It’s like ‘thoughts and prayers,’ which gets thrown around a lot. Sometimes you just gotta put your money where your mouth is.”

The Harrisese’s money has already been put to excellent use. With their gift, the Veterans Clinic has been able to hire an additional staff attorney to oversee students and serve many more veteran clients.

The new attorney is a familiar face to the Clinic. Carter Templeton is a Mizzou Law alumnus and former student in the Veterans Clinic. After working for two years within the Clinic as a student, Carter graduated and took a position on the East Coast with a law firm focusing on veterans law. For Carter, the mission of helping veterans is personal.

“Many of my family members served in the military, including both of my grandfathers who served in the Battle of the Bulge,” Templeton said. “It’s because of their stories that I initially gained an interest in serving those who have served. It’s extraordinarily rewarding for me to be able to meet with veterans and their families and help them navigate a complicated VA system to help secure for them the benefits they deserve. I’m grateful for those who help make positions like mine and others at the Clinic a possibility so we can assist as many veterans as possible.”

For the Harrisese, their motivation for helping veterans is similarly aligned.



Jane and Roger Harris donated \$500,000 to the MU Veterans Clinic to support an additional full-time staff attorney.

“We were extremely touched by this program and feel that our contribution is very impactful,” Jane Harris said. “We generally give to grass roots-type not-for-profits and stay away from organizations that are top heavy. The Veterans Clinic really spoke to us and ticked all the right boxes!”

Private support, such as the generosity of the Harrisese, is vital for the Clinic to grow its ability to help more veterans and their families receive the benefits they have rightfully earned. Currently, private gifts of all sizes fund 50% of the Clinic budget.

“We truly cannot carry out our goals without private funding,” said Angela Drake, Clinic founder and retiring director. “Corporations, law firms, generous alumni, and even gifts from our dedicated staff all work together to keep our lights on and our clients served.”

Currently, the Clinic consists of a director, three attorneys and four support staff to train dozens of students a year and serve a list of hundreds of clients. And the list of prospective clients keeps growing.

“The need among veterans and their families for our services continues to skyrocket,” Drake said. “With our current resources, it is impossible to come close to meeting that demand. We are very thankful for the financial support from the State of Missouri and from generous friends like Roger and Jane Harris. We are ever mindful of our stewardship obligations, as we help our nation’s veterans on behalf of a grateful nation. Our robust advocacy would simply not be possible without State funding and individual donations which, when combined, cover our operating budget.”

More than 325 people support the Veterans Clinic on a regular basis, with monthly donations ranging from as little as \$20 to enough money to support full-time attorneys, associated staff and much-needed office renovations. Many grateful clients also donate to the clinic, despite the fact that the legal services provided are free to clients.

From \$5 to \$500,000, support of any amount does and will go far in furthering the Clinic’s mission. To support the Veterans Clinic, visit: <https://veteransclinic.missouri.edu/donate> or call (573) 882-7630.

Years after IED blast in Afghanistan, Warsaw veteran receives his Purple Heart

By Ryan Collingwood, *Springfield News-Leader*

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It was nothing like the conflict that left him impaired and ended countless lives on Afghanistan soil, but the battle Justin Elmer had been waging was long, drawn-out and exhausting just the same.

An end came, finally, as the Warsaw resident and retired Army combat veteran sifted through his mail recently to discover a letter from the Army Board for Correction of Military Record, confirming his status as a Purple Heart recipient.

Elmer is 13 years removed from the IED blast that hit his single-occupant convoy during a route clearance near the Pakistan border. It knocked him unconscious and ultimately led to a traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder diagnosis.

The medal, which was initially denied to Elmer before appeals, arrived at his rural Missouri home last week, in time for Veterans Day.

For Elmer, a 39-year-old father of two teenaged sons, it was a matter of validation.

"It's more the acknowledgement you were injured in combat," Elmer said. "And my children could use the health benefits if they need."

Purple Heart officials initially said they couldn't conclude whether Elmer's TBI symptoms were derived from his combat service or came after, since he had applied for the medal years after an honorable discharge, according to application documents.

Service members who sustain more visible wounds often are granted the medal. TBI affected more than 450,000 U.S. veterans from 2000-2021, according to the Center of Disease Control, but it's a very broad spectrum of diagnosis that can impair several physical and cognitive functions that aren't as apparent.

After further examination and more documented evidence presented by to the Army Board for Correction of Military Record, it rendered a different verdict.

"TBI is something they don't even know how to handle to this day," said Elmer, a graduate of Lee Summit High School. "A lot of veterans



Justin Elmer is an Army combat veteran who was assisted by the Veterans Clinic to earn his Purple Heart.

in my spot give up. My hope is they see my case and not give up."

Elmer attempted to pursue careers as a welder and a policeman after his discharge, but his physical conditions worsened. His hands still shake and he needs regular epidurals for his back.

Similar to his Purple Heart application, it took years for Elmer to receive benefits through the Department of Veterans Affairs. With help from legal counsel at Veterans Clinic at University of Missouri School of Law, Elmer was able to secure benefits.

Brent Filbert, an attorney at the MU Veterans Clinic, helped compile the documentation that proved Elmer's TBI and military injury were linked. It ultimately helped Elmer secure his VA benefits and Purple Heart.

Elmer credits the Veterans Clinic's help and tenacity for bringing the years-long dispute with the Army Board to a close.

"They knew they weren't backing down," Elmer said.

Spring Successes



Veterans Clinic students and staff at the inaugural Veterans Clinic gala in Springfield, Mo.

In March, the Veterans Clinic held its first ever fundraising gala at the Hotel Vandivort in Springfield, Mo. The program featured Clinic and client highlights as well as a silent and live auction. The event raised nearly \$20,000 for the Clinic, which will help pay for independent medical examinations for our veteran clients, future outreach events, and other Clinic needs.



Brendan Franzoni is the recipient of the 2023 Bailey Award for his pro bono work advocating for veterans.

Congratulations to **Brendan Franzoni**, the recipient of the 2023 Bailey Award. The Bailey Award recognizes an outside attorney who exhibits zealous representation on behalf of veterans. Brendan works for Hughes Hubbard & Reid, where he serves as counsel for the firm's regulatory and compliance litigation practice groups. Brendan maintains a committed pro bono practice and has represented individuals in veterans affairs, child custody and family law matters and continues his ongoing commitment and work with the Midwest Innocence Project for the exoneration and release of the wrongfully convicted. He also works with the Volunteer Attorney Project in the protection of tenants' housing rights.



Mark Hough, Esq. interviewed by author Claudia Friddell about the Hello Girls at the 2023 Veterans Clinic Symposium.

The Veterans Clinic held its annual symposium this April to examine and discuss how future veterans law advocates can handle instances of discrimination in the military.

Interim Dean Paul Litton kicked off the symposium with opening remarks. The rest of the event consisted of various lectures and presentations from law professors, military personnel and practicing attorneys.

More than 200 attorneys and advocates joined in person and virtually to learn more about topics including the Vanessa Guillen case and other instances of sexual violence as told by Lieutenant Col. Angela Chipman; the untold story of the Hello Girls by keynote speaker Mark Hough, and "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" laws. Each session also featured a Q&A, where audience members engaged speakers on various topics in Veterans' law and discrimination in the military.

Mizzou Law professor and recent Kemper Awardee David Mitchell provided the closing remarks, rounding out a full day of productive conversation and networking.

The law school also hosted a live stream of the event for those who could not attend in person. A recording of the event is available here for those who wish to rewatch the symposium.

Mizzou Law looks forward to continuing to advance legal scholarship in the veterans law space and guiding students as they become future leaders across all areas of legal scholarship.

A Veteran Serving Veterans



Dr. Stephen Brietzke
University of Missouri School of Medicine

Mizzou Law is proud of its many interdisciplinary connections, from partnerships with other institutions on campus to hosting students with diverse academic backgrounds.

The Veterans Clinic, which provides veterans with free legal services as they pursue discharge upgrades and disability compensation claims, is pleased to announce retired physician Dr. Stephen Brietzke has joined the clinic as a volunteer medical consultant. In this role, he will assist law students and clinic faculty in determining the medical validity of veterans' claims to help the clinic provide the best legal advice possible.

"I'm essentially meeting with a law student to go over the medical facts of the case," Dr. Brietzke said. "I always emphasize to them--one of the most important things that any of us can do is be able to identify facts and distinguish facts from opinion. I try to help them discern that."

Dr. Brietzke first heard about the clinic from the dean of Mizzou's School of Medicine, Dr. Rick Barohn, who Dr. Brietzke first met during his own time in the U.S. Air Force.

When Angela Drake, director of the clinic, began looking to bring on more clinical consultants, Dr. Barohn suggested Dr. Brietzke following his recent retirement from full-time practice.

"That opened up days when my wife was eager to kick me out of the house," Dr. Brietzke said. "I emailed Professor Drake, and the rest is history."

Since joining the clinic, Dr. Brietzke has been impressed by the quality of Mizzou Law's students.

"To my very pleasant surprise, they're very similar to med students," Dr. Brietzke said. "The ones that I've worked with so far are very earnest, very well organized, really smart, and very committed to justice."

As students involved in Veterans Clinic continue to give back to those that served this country, the Mizzou Law community looks forward to working with experts in various fields to enhance its legal scholarship and student experience.

Staff Spotlight



Anita Cowan is the new executive assistant at the Clinic.

Anita Cowan is one of the Clinic's newest staff faces. Beginning work for the Clinic in April, Anita serves as Clinic's executive assistant. She has worked in several areas at the University of Missouri for more than 20 years, including the office of the vice chancellor for student affairs, as well as the dean of the Graduate School.

One of her dreams in life has been to work closely with veterans, as her husband Todd is an Army veteran; therefore, she has a very personal relationship to the work done in the Clinic. Anita also is a leader and social coordinator in the local chapter of Team Red, White, and Blue, a veterans non-profit organization.

"This position is the absolute best fit of any position for me," Anita said. "I am married to a disabled veteran, the daughter of a Vietnam veteran, and a leader for Team Red, White and Blue. Our veterans served selflessly for us; this is how I can do a small part to help them. It just seemed like the best place I could ever hang my hat."

She lives in Columbia with Todd, while her two children live nearby. She also has family in the United Kingdom, where she was originally born, with whom she was able to connect with through genealogy research recently. She has an adorable dog named Max and loves watching episodes of reality TV while enjoying a nice glass of wine.



Student Spotlight

Ethan Attebery earned the Filbert Award for his passion and initiative working as a student in the Veterans Clinic for the last two years.

After completing a degree in agribusiness at Oklahoma State University, Ethan Attebery decided to attend law school to earn a practical, versatile degree. Having just completed his 2L year at Mizzou Law, he has also found mentorship, real-world experience, and a full-time position.

"I knew that I wasn't done with school," Attebery said, "but I wasn't sure what I wanted to study next. I ultimately decided to attend Mizzou Law because the field is so practical, and you can enter many different careers with a JD— I couldn't have asked for a better experience."

During his time at Mizzou Law, Attebery credits Professor Drake and the Veterans Clinic for pushing him personally and professionally.

"I have really enjoyed making Columbia my new home while in school. The professors and fellow students at the law school are incredible," said Attebery. "The highlight of my law school journey has been both working and participating in the Veterans Clinic."

Ethan started working in the Veterans Clinic as a work study student his 1L year. As a work study student, Ethan helped with tracking Clinic metrics and developing and implementing a new client management software system. This project was a massive undertaking. In his 2L year, Ethan joined the Clinic as a student advocate and worked under the supervision of Clinic staff attorney Martha Kleinhesselink.

"Ethan was a compassionate and patient advocate for two very challenging cases," Kleinhesselink said. "He stayed in constant communication with his clients and was always thinking ahead on ways to help maximize those clients' benefits. His work was always on time and rarely needed revisions. Ethan was a stand-out student and has moved the Clinic forward in many ways. We will miss him!"

For his hard work and dedication to the Clinic, this spring Ethan was honored with the Filbert Award, which is given each year to a student in the Clinic who showed passion and initiative.

After his 1L year, Attebery completed an in-house internship with CareVet, a veterinary practice based in Saint Louis. The practice ultimately decided to extend a full-time, in-house offer—considered very rare for lawyers fresh out of law school.

"I always had a dream of working in-house and was so fortunate whenever they offered me the position," Attebery said. "I hope to continue working in-house throughout my career."

This fall, Attebery will begin full-time work a year early while simultaneously taking evening classes at Saint Louis University to complete his law degree.

Though Mizzou Law is sad to see him go, Attebery is sure to do great things as he takes the skills and knowledge he's acquired at Mizzou Law and puts them to work in the Saint Louis legal community.



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