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Caring is the cornerstone of **Villari, Brandes & Giannone P.C.**, a law firm devoted to fighting vigorously for the rights of injury victims. page 54



Prepared to Engage

Caring is the cornerstone of **Villari, Brandes & Giannone P.C.**, a law firm devoted to fighting vigorously for the rights of injury victims.

by **PHIL GIANFICARO** | photography by **JODY ROBINSON**

Every year around Christmas, Peter M. Villari opens his mailbox to find a card from a former client. It's an annual "thank you" for his help, and a reminder of how he and his law firm transformed—if not saved—the lives of this woman and her two children.

Villari, managing partner and senior trial lawyer at Villari, Brandes & Giannone P.C., has vivid memories of his former client. When he first met her, she was a single parent from Philadelphia in a desperate situation. She was unemployed with two young children, including one with cerebral palsy under the age of two.

The family was destitute, living in a cramped minivan. The mother had been repeatedly ignored and rejected by social agencies and the healthcare system as she

tried to secure benefits for her family. She was fired from her job because she had to miss so much time taking care of her disabled child. Then the woman received a parking ticket she could not pay.

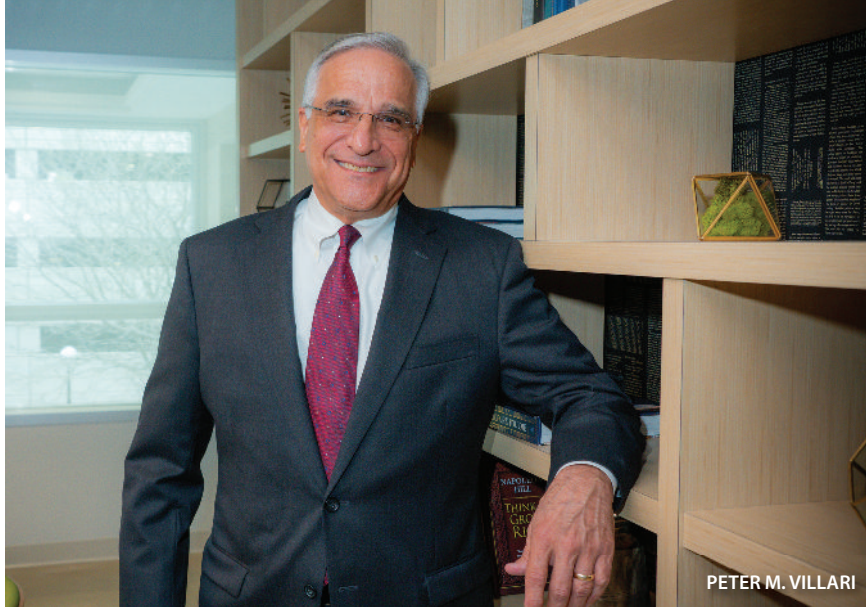
"A friend recommended the woman to us—she was about to get arrested—and we immediately got in the fight for her, wrapped our arms around her," says Villari. "We got benefits for her, and contacted social agencies in the city to get her a place to live and someone who would hire her. The child was

entitled to SSI (Supplemental Security Income). The mom wasn't getting unemployment even though she was fired because she couldn't show up to sign up for unemployment because she had to take care of the children.

"We got them the help they were entitled to," he continues. "The system had turned its back on them; we could not."

Villari dug even deeper for the family. He found there was a meritorious claim against the hospital where the disabled child was born, that the child was not delivered soon enough despite evidence of distress on the fetal monitor. He won the woman a settlement in the millions of dollars, and established a trust fund for the child. He found nursing care for the disabled child, which allowed the mom flexibility to hold a job. The woman eventually earned a college degree and purchased a home.

"To be able to help someone like that and still get a Christmas card every year is a great feeling," Villari says. "Sometimes, someone only needs to hear that you care about them. I think some lawyers all too



PETER M. VILLARI

often forget about that.”

At Villari, Brandes & Giannone, caring is the cornerstone of the firm’s commitment to clients. Whether a client needs representation after a vehicle accident, personal injury, birth injury, or medical malpractice, the firm’s attorneys and support staff are committed to delivering the finest legal representation with care and compassion.

For decades, Villari, Brandes & Giannone has fought vigorously for the rights of injury victims throughout the Delaware Valley and South Jersey. Their uncompromising approach has consistently produced sizable settlements and verdicts. Among them: \$27 million for a birth injury; \$15 million for a brain injury sustained during a train accident; and \$8.4 million for injuries sustained during a truck accident.

“You might call us a niche practice,” Villari says. “We basically take care of people who have been hurt by the negligence of others, a faulty product, or a faulty promise. We also do some general practice that caters to the needs of our clientele, family matters like wills, commercial agreements, and some estate work. We also keep very close ties to law firms that specialize in other needs our clients’ may have. If a client asks who we can refer them to, we know because we stay on top of those things.”

The Right Fit

For more than 40 years, Villari has been defending the rights of people and caring for their well-being as if they were members of his own family. He graduated magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Science from LaSalle University, before earning his Juris Doctor from Dickinson School of Law. Upon graduation, Villari began litigating cases on behalf of injured victims and commercial clients.

Villari and his partners in the firm—Paul D. Brandes, Theresa L. Giannone, and Nicole T. Matteo—have worked hard to create a family-oriented atmosphere much like the one in which Villari was raised. They believe this creates a collaborative work environment that ultimately benefits the clients.

“What I learned from working in the family business is this: Caring for the customer, listening to the customer, and treating them with respect is No. 1,” Villari says. “I was taught at a young age to care about the product and take care of the client. If you take care of the client—i.e., the person—the case will take care of itself.”

Villari notes that a person’s willingness to care deeply about a client as a person is paramount when interviewing lawyers to join the firm. Matteo is among them. Matteo, a mother of four, joined the firm’s complex litigation department in 2007.

“As a mother, I understand the struggles that parents face each day, let alone parents with a disabled child,” Matteo says. “It is important to me that I’m able to be there for them and help lift some of the weight off their shoulders.”

Attorney Eric M. Frost believes the same. A Super Lawyer Rising Star, Frost is a seasoned litigator who focuses his practice on personal injury cases.

“I loved the idea that when I came here Peter asked me, ‘Will you call people back? Will you be engaged with the clients?’” Frost says. “That’s one of the reasons I left my first firm; they weren’t engaged. Peter makes that emphasis. He encourages us to give clients our cell number.”

As Villari emphasizes, many people go to law school and earn law degrees. In his mind, being a successful attorney requires much more than a thorough understanding of the law; a genuine desire to help those in need is essential.

“During our interview process, we are committed to finding the right person to fit



ERIC M. FROST

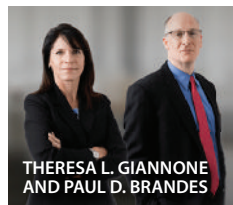


NICOLE T. MATTEO

our team,” he says. “That is as important, if not more important, than their qualifications. In my firm, from me on down, we listen to the clients. We let them know we’re there for them, if they’re having a bad day, or just want to talk. So many people today are facing a tragedy and don’t know where to go. Some lawyers today all too often forget that.”

He offers the reminder that attorneys were once known as counselors. He believes attorneys need to be counselors for clients now more than ever.

“Sometimes,” he says, “someone only needs to hear that you care.” ■



THERESA L. GIANNONE
AND PAUL D. BRANDES



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