

## Unsung Hero: Linda McGill, Portland lawyer with a global reach

**By David Treadwell | February 20, 2012 | Photo: Natalie Conn  
Reprinted with permission from *The Forecaster***

PORTLAND — In 2003, while working at a small Maine law firm, Linda McGill learned about the International Senior Lawyers Project, a new organization based in New York City and dedicated to providing world-class legal counsel to developing countries.

Seeking opportunities that would expand her teenage daughter's educational horizons as well as tap her own legal skills, McGill contacted the ISLP and soon thereafter a plan was made.



Linda McGill in her office at Bernstein Shur on Middle Street in Portland.

McGill and her daughter, Amelia Nugent, spent 5 ½ life-changing months in New Delhi, India. While there, McGill worked with the Human Rights Law Network's legal staff on a wide range of human-rights issues, including violations of defendants' rights, workplace sexual harassment, environmental justice and discrimination against the dalit (the outcasts of India's society).

In addition to attending the American Embassy School, Nugent got involved with real people with real issues.

"She'd come to the office and attend rallies," McGill said. "She also worked at a homeless shelter, helping raise money so kids could have their own lockers at the shelter.

"I was the Beta project, and it worked out well," McGill recalled – she was the first ISLP-sponsored lawyer to spend an extended period of time in a developing country.

McGill has returned to India three times since that first stay and she continues to serve as an adviser to the Human Rights Law Network and the Center for Constitutional Rights in India.

Indeed, shortly after she began working with Bernstein Shur, one of northern New England's largest law firms, McGill took one of her trips for ISLP. She noted that she chose to join Bernstein Shur because, "in addition to giving me the opportunity to cross-fertilize with great lawyers in other fields, the firm has a strong community conscience."

Inspired by her work with ISLP, McGill has become an ardent ambassador on behalf of the organization. As she proudly noted, "Maine has more lawyers per capita involved in ISLP efforts than any other state."

To cite but a few examples of Maine-based ISLP volunteers:

- Joseph Hahn, a retired partner of Bernstein Shur, has worked with Civicus, a South Africa-based international nonprofit that focuses on supporting civil society and the right to freedom of expression around the world.
- The husband-and-wife team of Bill Coogan (a retired professor of government and constitutional law) and Kim Matthews (a retired civil liberties lawyer and general practitioner) spent five months in Kenya working with Gibson Kuria, a prominent Kenyan human rights lawyer and laureate of the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights.
- And Richard Spencer, a shareholder in the Maine law firm of Drummond Woodsum, spent three months in Mongolia working with the Centre for Human Rights and Development to help build its environmental advocacy program.

Because of her extensive involvement with the International Senior Lawyers Project, McGill was honored as a “Volunteer of the Decade” by the organization in December. She said she derives the most satisfaction, however, from the work of her fellow Maine lawyers on ISLP programs and from the achievements of her daughter.

Nugent, McGill’s daughter, majored in international relations at Mount Holyoke College and is currently working for Teach for America in Phoenix, Ariz.