



Lawyers look to grant wishes for low-income seniors

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The next time you want to badmouth lawyers—which is probably, like, right this minute—consider the case of **Genser Dubow Genser & Cona**, a Long Island firm that specializes in elder law.

Partner Jennifer Cona said that over the years handling clients' estate planning, protecting their assets, or helping them prepare for nursing home care, she keeps meeting older people who can't make ends meet.

"Everyone knows about a senior who's cutting pills in half or skipping meals," Cona said.

The law firm had set up a charitable arm already, but it decided to expand it this year and help seniors in the model of the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

"There's nobody out there doing for seniors like they are for children," she said.

The firm created "Senior Dreams," and began raising funds to grant wishes. To qualify, a senior citizen cannot have an income greater than \$1,500 per month individually, or \$2,000 per couple. Genser Law wants to reward seniors who've done good works.

Like 69-year-old Anna Costoro, who lives on Social Security near the town of Riverhead, New York.

"I never in my life entered a contest to win anything, but I thought, 'What the heck?'" Costoro said of applying to Senior Dreams. "My son said, 'Oh, mom, why are you bothering?'" Costoro is a breast cancer survivor who had organized a charity where she and friends made and sold dolls of Jesus and gave the proceeds to orphanages. Among the wishes she asked the law firm to fulfill was a request for dental work.

"I don't have dental coverage," she said.

Genser Law granted that wish. It even had Costoro driven to Mount Sinai Hospital, where a dentist "did a wonderful job" fixing her teeth.

Other granted wishes include building a wheelchair ramp for a woman so she could stay in her home. Cona said the contractor only charged them \$3,000 to \$4,000. "We got a good deal," she said.

Perhaps most moving, Senior Dreams paid to take a widow to visit her disabled adult daughter living in a group home upstate. The woman hadn't seen her daughter for five years, ever since her husband—who did all the driving—passed away.

"That's life altering," said Cona, who added that the firm is not looking to grant wishes for things like credit card debt or the results of bad decisions, but "something that will really change their lives."

Recently, a group called **100 Women Who Care About Long Island** donated \$7,000 to Senior Dreams, and the law firm is now putting out a new "Call for Wishes." Log onto the website for more details.

The venture has once again proven it is better to give than to receive. "We love it," said the lawyer, "it's our favorite thing to do."