



**PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Interview: Bobby Peterson (608) 444-7197; Mike Rust (715) 485-8525

ABC for Rural Health's Mike Rust Recognized for Lifetime Achievement

Balsam Lake, WI – ABC for Rural Health is proud to announce that its Chief Operating Officer, Mike Rust, is the recipient of the 2015 Ryan Klesh Legal Worker Award. The award, given by the Wisconsin State Bar Public Interest Law Section, recognizes and celebrates professionals whose contributions and commitment to helping others and to furthering the practice of public interest law are noteworthy and commendable. The Section will present The Ryan Klesh Award to Mike at the State Bar of Wisconsin's 2016 Annual Meeting & Conference Member Recognition Ceremony on June 16 in Green Bay, WI.

Like Ryan Klesh, Mike possesses a contagious selflessness, a willingness to roll up his sleeves and tackle challenging issues. "Mike navigates tough issues with passion and a rapier wit that has helped him effectively promote issues of social justice and health equity on behalf of low income families for decades," says Bobby Peterson, Executive Director of ABC for Health, a public interest law firm in Madison, WI and parent company of ABC for Rural Health, Inc. Peterson continues, "When Mike first moved to Wisconsin, over 28 years ago, he helped pioneer the concept and practice of Health Benefits Counseling. Throughout his career he has helped thousands of families across Wisconsin secure health coverage through either direct counseling, or training and supporting other colleagues like public health officials, and nurses."

Over the past several years, Mike's researched access to mental health coverage and care in rural communities. While working as a Project Director for the Western Wisconsin Mental Health Audit Project, Mike helped identify eligibility and coverage barriers that deterred patients from the mental and behavioral health services and benefits they needed. The findings produced by this research project led to a HRSA funded project, "Polk County Safetyweb Network Project," which fosters partnerships between providers, technology professionals, and public interest attorneys to create a Health Benefits Counseling Network to better deliver services to low-income, underserved patients.

Peterson continues, "The impact of Mike's work has inspired, impressed, and impacted many advocates across the state and country. The true measure of Mike's impact is in the services he extends to, and the difference he makes, in the lives of the families and clients he works with every day."

The award is named in honor of Ryan Klesh who worked on the administrative staff for SeniorLAW at Legal Action of Wisconsin's Milwaukee office until his death in 2006. The Public Interest Law Section of the State Bar describes Ryan as "Someone who set the standard for being 'selfless to a fault.' He gave everything- his intellect, spot-on humor, time, attention, empathy, kindness, stories, authenticity, music and band recommendations, zest for life, and advice and world observations – to everyone and he did so regardless of any cost to himself."

ABC for Rural Health is a Polk County-based nonprofit, public interest law firm dedicated to delivering Family Health Benefits Counseling to patients throughout rural Wisconsin. ABC for Rural Health's mission is to provide health care consumers with the information, advocacy tools, legal services, and expert support they need in order to obtain, maintain, and finance health care coverage and services.

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