

Speaker 1 ([00:03](#)):

Hi, this is Caroline Heller, chair Greenberg chart's global pro bono program. I'd like to welcome you to Greenberg chart's pro bono podcast. Good in practice because everyone has a story. On today's episode, I interview Jeff Ginsburg, who is the chief executive officer of the east Harlem tutorial program. I also interview Steven Rabinowitz, who is a co-chair of Greenberg charter school bubble real estate practice and located in the New York office. I've known Steven ever since I've been at Greenberg chart, which is a very, very long time. And Steven has always been somebody who leads by example. And one way in which he does, this is through his pro bono work as a former managing shareholder of the New York office. He has often spoken to associates shareholders enough counsel about the importance of doing pro bono work, but he not only talks about it. He does it.

Speaker 1 ([01:00](#)):

And on this episode, I interview him and Jeff that Greenberg Traurig ex real estate work to assist east Harlem tutorial program. The east Harlem tutorial program, otherwise known as EHTP was founded in 1958 by a community leader who began offering a volunteer run reading group in her living room. Since then EHTP has grown from a tutoring program into a multi-site multi-dimensional educational program, offering services to approximately 1600 pre-K to college students throughout the year. They offer these services in several different ways to their traditional public school students. They offer afterschool and summer programs. They also have the east Harlem scholars academies network of public charter schools, the college scholars program, and the east Harlem teaching residency by 2025. Each TP is on track to serve one in five east Harlem students. We broken down this interview into two episodes because Jeff and Steven and I had really in-depth discussion both about EHTP and its work Greenburg shark's work and the importance of pro bono work in general, especially the importance of giving back to the communities in which we live. So I hope you enjoy this episode and join us in two weeks for the conclusion.

Speaker 1 ([02:26](#)):

Thank you so much for appearing on the podcast with us today. We're really excited to speak with you. Um, I was hoping you could start by telling us a little bit about how the east Harlem tutorial program got started

Speaker 2 ([02:39](#)):

Very well. Carolyn, first of all, thanks for having me and thanks for those listening about the work. Uh, so you started tutorial program started in 1958 community-based afterschool programs and a real leader and model and its field with a small organization. East Harlem is 96th street to that 130 street, depending on who you ask fifth avenue to the river. And, you know, historically, uh, east Harlem has had just extraordinary under investment in education and infrastructure, um, and healthcare supports. And it's historically been the victim of enormous amounts of racism and, uh, sort of ignorance and, and sort of ignoring from policy makers, um, and sort of, you know, fellow citizens and neighbors alike and Eddie HTP over the years, we've tried to expand our work and have done so in particular, since 2011, when we opened up a group of schools called scholars academies, and that was now five of those that range all the way from pre-K eventually to 12th grade right now, we're up to 10th grade.

Speaker 2 ([03:50](#)):

We have this group of, I call them endless seniors. They started with us in first grade. They keep coming up up the grades and they're up to 10th grade. Um, and so we have, you know, two elementary, two

middle schools and a high school that is still growing. And again, as of seventh grade, now we've added a teaching, uh, development programs are unique and leading the conversation, the country on teacher pipeline, it's called east Harlem teaching residency. Um, and we've done a number of things to support that work. And even just recently started a group called the second avenue consultancy, which works with nonprofits firms, um, schools, others on thinking about how you can have a more anti-racist organization, um, and act in a more anti-racist way in your day to day, um, promoting equity in your, in your own world. We have several locations of afterschool programs that range all the way from kindergarten to 12th grade.

Speaker 2 ([04:43](#)):

And then we have summer programs and college access and success programs that were with students all the way up to 22. And we've even launched our alumni association and alumni work in recent years, which is working with alumni who are, you know, well, well beyond, uh, college and school. And so during that time though, we've always been as community-based group. And so where our sites have been have mattered, we believe that every family in east Harlem should be able to walk to a fantastic school if they so choose a, should be able to walk to a great afterschool program, they should be able to walk to a place where they're cared about and cared for where they feel safe, where they feel loved, um, and where they can learn that they are as brilliant and as beautiful as anyone else. Um, and can have all the opportunities open to them into the future while also understanding the realities of the, of their local, uh, geography of the city, the state, the country, the world that they're in.

Speaker 1 ([05:44](#)):

So in the beginning, did it start off as a school or was it a community-based program or something else

Speaker 2 ([05:51](#)):

Started as afterschool programs from 1958, all the way to 2011? And we run those programs. We work with traditional public schools all the way from K through the end of college, again, in the afterschool field, working with students who go to traditional public schools. But in 2011, we added that extra network of schools that are, we run call these arms scholars academies, as well as the teaching residency program, which prepares teachers will bar schools and programs, but teachers to serve students around the city. And for that matter around the country. Can

Speaker 1 ([06:24](#)):

You tell us a little bit about the expansion and how Greenberg Traurig got involved to assist in that expansion process?

Speaker 2 ([06:33](#)):

Yeah, well, you know, so I've had, um, the great fortune of knowing Steve Rabinowitz for a long time now. And when he went in, I really first got to know each other and got involved real estate. Actually, wasn't a huge topic for us. I mean, it was a topic for non a non-profit and that, you know, where our space was in the space we had mattered. And while it's really hard to do great afterschool programs, real estate was not an enormous challenge sort of as, as we understood at the very beginning when I got to the organization as the CEO in 2008. Uh, but as Steven, uh, predicted at that time and has come true, uh, real estate has ended up having to be something we really good at or else it would hurt our students and families outcomes. And that's for a couple reasons.

Speaker 2 ([07:22](#)):

One is probably anyone listening to this knows, uh, east Harlem in a changing neighborhood, uh, in terms of affordability. Um, secondarily, that doesn't mean that the residents who are there, uh, don't um, still have enormous needs, especially for those residents. Who've been in historically in public housing and the NYCHA housing are still there. Um, and now can't afford, uh, rent or afford the food at the grocery store and for EHTP, um, as a local organization, we want to be there to support them, but we need to be able to put as much money as possible into our teaching and learning into our materials and to our programs. Um, but at the same time, we needed to have the space to do that. Um, and that was particularly true now when we need our students to be six feet apart, but it's always been true. Uh, and, and, and these Tarlow spaces are premium we're in Manhattan.

Speaker 2 ([08:17](#)):

And the organization has had a complex growth trajectory where we've tried to really focus on that teaching and learning, but really be smart about real estate. And so, uh, we were lucky that, uh, Steven was already involved, um, and gotten involved as I'm sure you'll say cause of the, cause not, not necessarily because of real estate, but we, but we, we had him involved in it. So it turned out we had a great expertise to tap into. And so as he, um, you know, has with, along with a couple of others, Jonathan and hope night led a specialized group that we have real estate committee, um, over many years now, we've, we've just navigated having to add basis. So we we've built one building that houses, two of our schools where we've dealt with complicated lease arrangements to, to expand our administrative staff, um, to expand some of our afterschool work.

Speaker 2 ([09:11](#)):

We have a site that we have to share. That's part of the city of new York's properties that has its own complications of using that space. So, and then we are right now in the, in the midst of a once and a many, many generation projects, the first new public high school facility. And we think almost 60 years and he's tar alone, uh, which is, you know, a property that was owned by the archdiocese, um, that they wanted to sell to us as they were consolidating. And which we're now building a 70,000 square foot high school, both facilities I'll note are on a corner in Manhattan, um, which I've now learned to makes it even more complicated for your listeners and show they already got that. But I didn't know. And, you know, and I think that the biggest headline I'd also just add is we want to attract the best possible talent we want, right?

Speaker 2 ([10:02](#)):

It, teaching is hard. Anyone who is working with their child at home right now and dealing with it knows this better than ever, but anyone who just went to school or is that kids who go to school, anybody who's just tried to learn anything. Anyone is listening to this, trying to learn how to do better. Pro bono work learning is hard. Learning is difficult. And so we need the best possible talent to do that. And when you have a great facility, you, you tell the community this matters and you tell talent, you matter. Uh, and so, and so real estate has been really critical, but we had no idea what we were doing. And we often still don't know what we're doing because we're good at doing and teaching learning, right. That's what we were built to be good at, uh, not to be good at real estate, but we've had to get good at real estate or can affect the teaching and learning. And that's where Greenberg's are. And Steven, and a whole bunch of incredible people from the firm have stepped in.

Speaker 1 ([10:55](#)):

Yeah. I think that if any of us have learned to appreciate teachers, it has been during the pandemic when we had to try to instruct some of our children at home. And some teachers have been a little bit more adept at adapting to the situation than others. Um, I think this is a great time for Stephen. Can you tell us a little bit about how you first got involved in east Harlem tutorial program and then a little bit about how you got Greenberg Traurig involved in the legal work that they needed?

Speaker 3 ([11:23](#)):

So at this point, probably well over 20 years ago, a good friend of mine, um, who I had practiced with at a previous law firm was on the EHTP board. He was out of the law practice, was in the movie business and recruited me. Uh, we, we meaning me and angry, had already been, uh, giving some financial support to EHTP, but, uh, my friend said, well, you know, we don't a lawyer on the board and it makes sense that as we're expanding the board and trying to expand the school, that we we'd have a lawyer on the board, would you like to do that? And I said, yes. And part of it was, um, I had, I had, you know, kind of dabbled, uh, or stuck my toe into a number of pro bono and community activities before. But, you know, hadn't really yet latched onto anything that, that really got my, you know, uh, that, that really set me a flame, you know, anything that really inspired me.

Speaker 3 ([12:24](#)):

And I came from a family of teachers, my mom's a teacher, uh, I have three sisters, they were all teachers. Um, and, and my first job, my first job, both before law school and during law school, was it the, what was then the New York city board of education? So I I've, I've always been very tightly tied to education and particularly New York city education. My mom, my mom was a public school teacher, um, and then an administrator for many years. And, and I had had my job at the board of education. And, you know, so this was the, this really kind of, you know, the opportunity really, you know, got to the core of who I was and what I was really interested in. And, you know, the folks on the board were people who I think were also like-minded, you know, very, very devoted to the, the educational mission mission within New York city.

Speaker 3 ([13:14](#)):

And my, my view was, is, you know, at that point I'd already been a real estate lawyer for let's say, 15 years or so. And I felt like I, I worked in an industry and a, in a, um, in an area that's so effected, um, and was so tied to the community that I felt a responsibility for our profession, particularly real estate lawyers in our community, the real estate community to start giving back to the, to the community and to the city that we had such a big impact on. Um, and that was really the start. And at the time EHTP owned, uh, its own building, which, which had been deeded to it, um, from it by a church that had gone out of business, uh, in east Harlem, one address away from they're separated by a building in the middle. Um, they owned another small parcel that, that they had acquired from, uh, the EDC.

Speaker 3 ([14:08](#)):

And we hit at the time, had a vision of building like a 30,000 square foot community center on the corner property. And over the years, as, as the mission started growing the vision for what we needed to do with real estate started growing. And so first it was trying to figure out how to buy that building in the middle, and then trying to figure out how to, how to build and finance, um, what was going to be, uh, really the first piece of real estate that EHTP owned. And there were, there were a bunch of challenges, one being just the emotional connection of that EHTP and the community had to the

building where they had been located for so many, um, you know, and then a variety of other challenges that you always have in building a building in Manhattan. How do you deal with the neighbors?

Speaker 3 ([14:59](#)):

How do you deal with the complexity of the site? How do you, how do you, you know, we had raised money for the building right before the financial crisis, then the financial crisis hit and we had to take the money. We had raised for the building and use it for programs and operating expenses. And, you know, then starting a capital campaign again. And over the course of the years, as each of those issues came up, we in the firm started getting more and more involved with the HTP. So, you know, first it was me even before it was real estate issues, me just giving general corporate advice and, and give it having giving a legal, uh, uh, a legal view on various issues that came up to the board. Then it was trying to figure out how do we buy that building in the middle than it was while we got some zoning issues.

Speaker 3 ([15:47](#)):

So, uh, Jay Siegel and then more so Nick Hawkins in our, in our zoning group and, and land use group got very involved. Um, then it became time to finance a new building, and it was, you know, we started bringing people who, who could work on the financing came in. We had some folks from our Chicago office do the, the, uh, new markets tax credit financing, Randyland DeMoss. And in our department in New York, who is ourself, a member of the community of east Harlem and herself, a former teacher has, has gotten very involved in the HTP stuff with me. And, you know, that's, that's been a great relationship. So over the years, as the needs have grown, as the issues have become more complex, we've, we've brought in more and more people from the firm and, and the people in the firm have been, you know, really so happy to contribute and have become willing partners.

Speaker 3 ([16:37](#)):

We don't obviously force anyone at Greenberg Traurig to do pro bono work on a particular project. We have pro bono requirements for our associates, but I have found very many willing partners, uh, around the firm. You know, it's now included how Bierman in, in our real estate operations group is helping us deal with the neighbors. It's, it's really become a big group and, and of people who are really, really willing to pitch in and, uh, and do the work. And now we're building a 70,000 square foot high school, um, with some very, very complicated site issues and it's required a really big team and, and it's been great. Um, and it's a, it's a wonderful relationship that we have with the HDP. We are really part of the team. And, you know, for me, working with people like Jeff, uh, has been really interesting. And I, I really hope that this kind of, you know, that our, our pro bono and community work that we do with the firm that, that each, that the relationship we have at HDP becomes a model where it's not just individual people doing individual projects, but a real partnership that can grow between two organizations who can really help each other mutually, um, you know, we can help EHTP in what it needs and they can help us be humans.

Speaker 3 ([17:56](#)):

Uh, and it's, it's a great thing.

Speaker 1 ([17:59](#)):

Steven, how many GT attorneys would you say have worked on projects for EHTP over the past decade, if

Speaker 3 ([18:08](#)):

You were to, I mean, we could look, we could look at the time records, but I would say it's at least 15 or 20, um, from every, you know, like I said, we've had tax people, you know, people who have worked on new markets, tax credits, people who've worked on financing, people who I've consulted for general, you know, board and corporate governance issues. And, you know, so it's, it's really been a wide group of people and not only limited to people in our New York office,

Speaker 1 ([18:37](#)):

Um, you know, something that we've talked about this before, uh, you and I, Steven about the importance of this project to you and, and, and over the years, how it's been important. And you've said something today that you've said to me before, that really resonated and, you know, whenever anybody asks me, well, what kind of pro bono can I get involved in? I asked them, well, what is, what means something to you? And you mentioned how this community in New York city, which has been such where you do business, which is what you typically do. You know, you want to give back to it and also mentioning how having your family, a family of teachers, you want to give back to that community as well. And I think it's particularly important for people to hear that because that's the way you find great pro bono projects, where you can help in an area of that means something to you personally. So it feels good. And often you're giving back to a community that supported you when you needed them.

Speaker 3 ([19:29](#)):

Yeah. I mean, it's something that I always tell young lawyers, um, which is, uh, when you're, when you're still growing up in this business, you should try many things with regard to pro bono work, because you may do some where you do a great job and you're committed to it because we're professionals and we're committed to everything we do, but it doesn't really ignite something in you. And I, and I believe that over time, if you try enough, you're going to find something that ignites you and really, you know, results in something that you can really stay connected to for your entire career. If you're going to be doing something throughout your career, why not have it be something that, that really, you know, is, is so personal to you. And that's why I'm always telling young lawyers to try as many things. And it goes beyond, it goes beyond pure pro bono service. It goes to board service and community involvement as well. I happen to be very fortunate in that I've found the HTP where it can be an outlet for both of those things for me, but, but I, I view the responsibility of, of lawyers to, to, you know, it's a double responsibility, not only pro bono work, but also, uh, community involvement, commitment as well.

Speaker 1 ([20:43](#)):

So, Jeff, I want to talk to you about something that you had mentioned passing, but I think it's particularly important. Uh, you mentioned that especially during this time of the pandemic space and the way that the buildings have been constructed schools, events instructed are extremely important. Can you tell me a little bit about how the facility is that EHTP has, have been able to address the pandemic and, and a little bit just about how the spacing and the buildings that were built were important to that?

Speaker 2 ([21:14](#)):

Yeah, so, you know, a couple things to think about one we're seeing more and more data that during the pandemic, if you are white, you are more likely to have been in person way more, uh, during the pandemic, uh, than if you are black or Latin X. Um, and there's a number of reasons for that. Uh, but one of them, I think that's emerging pretty clearly does have to do with, with space. And, you know, there's a

lot of facilities that were too small, uh, on, you know, under invested in, um, didn't have air filtration, didn't have, you know, all the things, the technology, um, just didn't even have enough space period in, uh, communities of color and communities where there's less income. And so, you know, I always explain to people, you know, like, you know, we, we, we went to the, we went into the pandemic with the country we have, right.

Speaker 2 ([22:25](#)):

And we went with the city we had, and we went with the school system that we have, and that school system is, is not equitable. Um, and so I find it not surprising, just sad that students on the upper east side or students in private schools have been in school, um, far more than students, uh, typically in east Harlem. And one thing that's been three HDP is that we've actually had our elementary school students in a hybrid model since September. And the reason we've been able to do that is because our elementary school students were able to go into the private facility, which with Greenberg, Jarvis held, we had control over. And what did control meant control meant that we could, uh, implement all of the protective measures and safety measures that we have the appropriate technology that we had, the appropriate spacing, that it was an efficient space that we had the appropriate air filtration system we could, and we could make adjustments to that as needed, you know, so it has been game changing to both have a high quality space, but also have it to have a space that we have some say over.

Speaker 2 ([23:35](#)):

And so I think that, uh, just like, uh, Shirley, anyone listening to this would know in New York city, if you don't control your real estate, uh, you probably don't have control of anything. Uh, if you don't control your real estate, then you don't control the outcomes of your business. You don't control the outcomes of the things you care about. And, uh, and you're not going to control any real estate unless you really have the expertise to navigate it. So I think we've been in similar situation. And so, you know, as we go to build this new high school, certainly, you know, we're building a a hundred year building just like we build the last building in, um, well, it was about a hundred years in between pandemics, right? So I, you know, I, I think, uh, uh, hopefully it'll be just as long if not longer, but I think, you know, we prepare for all sorts of things by building a high quality building east Harlem was actually people don't always realize this east Harlem, uh, had a real issue with hurricane Sandy.

Speaker 2 ([24:30](#)):

We had real flooding, uh, off the east river and hurricane Sandy, um, and our buildings are prepared for that as well. Right. And so I think, uh, it's just, these are just the things you need to do. So you can try to have the most continuation of education as possible. And just sorta to, to emphasize this point, because we're, we actually are doing a really strong model online, and we have near 90% attendance of our students who are online, our middle school and high school students are online. And we're very proud of that, but I think, you know, uh, it's important to remember that real estate allows human interaction, right? It allows for a positive human interaction, really positive, especially when the building is set up, right. It allows for difficult conversations and for emotional conversations. And it allows for places of healing and solidarity.

Speaker 2 ([25:23](#)):

It allows for necessary arguments and disputes, right? It allows for hugs and handshakes and all the things that we miss, but the things that help bond us, and it allows the things that help people heal. Um, and there will be a lot of healing needed as we both now, and as we come out of this pandemic and as

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we live in a polarized and politically polarized, uh, society, both nationally and locally. And so it's very important in a model like ours, where we care about our students, not just learning the nuts and bolts, the math and reading, but also being strong communicators and building really strong relationships, both with each other and with the adults in our buildings to have a facility that can allow for that. And it's going to be no more important ever that as we come out of of this pandemic. And so it's just very exciting to at least have the possibility of that. The building won't make it so we can do that, but it allows for it.

Speaker 1 ([26:19](#)):

You've been listening to Greenberg charts, pro bono podcast. Good in practice. I'm your host, Caroline Heller, chair of Greenberg Traurig, global pro bono program and litigation shareholder in the New York office. On today's episode, I interviewed Jack Ginsberg, the chief executive officer of the east Harlem tutorial program and Stephen Rabinowitz co-chair of Greenberg charts, global real estate practice. I hope you join us in two weeks when I continued the conversation with Jeff and Steven about the intricacies of Greenberg Charles real estate work for EHTP the importance of pro bono in our communities, as well as a little information about east Harlem and the people who live there.