

Irell, Project for the Innocent Secure Woman's Freedom

Professionals

Thomas W. Barr, Ph.D.

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Irell & Manella LLP teamed up with the Project for the Innocent at Loyola Law School to assist pro bono in freeing a woman who was wrongly convicted of murder. The woman, Jane Dorotik, was freed after spending nearly two decades in prison, thanks in part to the work of Irell Scientific Fellow Dr. Thomas Barr, who helped dismantle the shaky circumstantial evidence underlying her conviction. That "evidence" included bloodstain pattern analysis, tire and shoe impression comparisons, trace evidence, serology and DNA analysis, and vehicle dynamics reconstruction. As just one example, the tire tread analysis put forward by the prosecution cherry-picked one point along the tracks to argue that the width between the tires matched Ms. Dorotik's vehicle. But Thomas and the Project for the Innocent showed that the accuracy of the tire mark measurements was so poor that the tire separation could match nearly any vehicle, from a small car to a large truck.

According to Paula Mitchell, director of the Project for the Innocent:

"This victory would not have been possible without the support of Irell and Thomas Barr. Thomas made himself available at all hours to consult on a number of issues, from FTIR spectroscopy to computer-aided design software, putting counsel in the best possible position to challenge the admissibility and reliability of the forensic evidence at preliminary hearing and pre-trial.

"Irell's unique ability to lend scientific expertise on a pro bono basis was a game-changer in this case. The breadth of Thomas's expertise is astounding, and his experience with complex, high-stakes litigation made this partnership seamless. This victory has allowed Ms. Dorotik, at 75 years old, to put this 22-year-long nightmare behind her. We could not be more grateful, and we look forward to collaborating with Thomas and Irell in the future."