Celebrating Access to the Law for Those Who Need It Most

by Paul Clark, President, MCBA

Law Day is upon us again. One of the continuing efforts of the Montgomery County Bar Association over the past several years has been the creation of a platform for our pro bono work so that access to our legal system is ensured. While many of our members have provided incredible amounts of legal assistance to those in our community who would not otherwise have access to such services, the MCBA Board has sought to create a formal program through which the efforts of our members could be coordinated and the participation of more of our lawyers could be encouraged.

Last year, this program was solidified with the creation of the MCBA Pro Bono/Volunteer Lawyer Committee. This committee, ably helmed by Royal Dumas of Hill, Hill, Carter, Franco, Cole, and Black, PC, has organized and presented several pro bono clinics in the Montgomery area over the past year. These clinics, open to the public, have done an incredible job in fulfilling the mission of the committee by providing free legal services and counseling within our community. While we all cringe a bit at the pervasively poor general perception of lawyers these days, the pro bono clinics are a shining example of the true spirit of the members of this Association. If you haven’t had the chance to participate in one of these clinics, I would encourage you to do so. Call Royal (334-834-7600) and tell him that you are willing to support this effort – you won’t regret the service that you will provide.

Also, I would continue to encourage each of you to sign up for the Alabama State Bar’s Volunteer Lawyer Program. Increasing the number of our members who are VLP participants has also been a concerted effort undertaken by the MCBA Board and many of you have answered the call. Thank you to all of you who have renewed your commitment to this program and to those of you who have signed up for the first time during the campaign. If you have not joined the VLP program, please call the Alabama State Bar (334-269-1515) or visit the State bar website at www.alabar.org to sign up today. Members of the MCBA will be participating in another phone-a-thon in the coming weeks to reach those of you who may not have signed up yet. If you get a call, all you have to do is say “yes” and the rest will be done for you.

Whether it’s through the MCBA pro bono clinics, the VLP program, or both, please help the MCBA celebrate Law Day by giving legal aid to those who need it most.

Paul Clark, 2010 President, MCBA

Law Day Breakfast—May 6, 2010
7:30 a.m. at the Alabama Activity Center, 201 Dexter Avenue
Cost $15 each – RSVP by April 26 – 265-4793
Law Day 2010—”And Justice for All”

By Thomas J. Methvin, President, Alabama State Bar

Each year on May 1, the Alabama State Bar participates in the recognition of Law Day. Law Day activities play an important role in the educational and outreach efforts of the Alabama State Bar (ASB). This is an opportunity for us to share how the law directly affects all of us, in a positive way.

The theme for Law Day 2010 was “And Justice for All.” We chose this theme in order to emphasize the importance of Access to Justice for the poor in civil cases. Access to justice is the number one priority of our state bar this year, since Alabama is dead last in funding for this. The average state spends $4.1 million per year. Alabama spends $300,000. As a result, there are a lot of hurting people without legal representation. Thankfully, since July 2009, Alabama lawyers have agreed to make voluntary donations of $750,000 for Access to Justice. Also, more than 1,200 new lawyers have joined our Volunteer Lawyer Program (VLP).

We are on the right track.

In keeping with this, we issued a challenge to all local bar associations to increase their participation in the VLP during Law Day celebrations. We provided the President of each local bar with a list of participation percentages in very circuit in Alabama. Circuits that show the greatest increase in participation will be recognized at the ASB Annual Meeting in July.

This year, we also greatly expanded our Law Day activities, with the goal of having the best Law Day celebration in the history of the ASB. Law Day activities were held in almost every judicial circuit. Our activities this year were designed to help those in need, to promote Volunteer Lawyer service, and create positive public relations for lawyers. We held law “help line” programs on local television stations, free legal clinics, and a variety of contests and events at local schools.

In Montgomery County, a highlight of local Bar activities is the first ever Law Day Breakfast. During this breakfast the MCBA will present its first “Pro Bono Lawyer of the Year” award. This new award will not only recognize the service and dedication of one lawyer, but we hope will inspire others to become involved with this very important program.

The MCBA also established a new program where we phoned lawyers to ask them to participate in the VLP. As a result, participation in the VLP among Montgomery County lawyers increased from 25 to 44 percent. More Phone Bank events are scheduled, so MCBA expects to see these numbers continue to increase.

I believe the Law Day program will continue to grow. It is my hope that it will inspire young people to practice law, and encourage attorneys to share their time and talents with those less fortunate through the VLP. I also hope that through Law Day activities, the public has a better understanding of what lawyers do, and the services we render.

Montgomery Has First Veterans’ Court in the State

Veteran’s Court in Montgomery County officially began on April 14, 2010. The jail personnel will identify any veteran who comes in contact with the criminal justice system. Once a veteran has been identified, Veteran’s Court, under the leadership of Judge Tracy McCooey, will identify what services are necessary for the veteran. For example, a veteran with a drug problem may be eligible for Drug Court; however, the veteran will receive treatment through the VA hospital, attend NA/AA meetings designated specifically for veterans and have a veteran peer support person assigned to the veteran to help him or her complete Drug Court. The goal of Veterans Court is to be all-encompassing when it comes to serving veterans. (Cont. p.5)
Thank You, Sponsors!

As of press time, the following businesses and individuals had committed as Sponsors for the Common Ground Montgomery Charity Fundraiser:

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Law School Final Exams- The Good, The Bad and The Ugly
By Rose Metzger & Brett Smith, J.D. Candidate 2012, Tamika R. Miller- Editor, J.D. Candidate 2010

Top 10 Reasons Why I Love Law School Exams!
1. Exams give me the chance to create the perfect outline.
2. I can set a new Guinness record for going the longest without sleep.
3. My speed reading and memory skills become phenomenal.
4. I can participate in research on manic-depressive disorder.
5. Several weeks of diet Coke, take-out pizza, twinkies, and wine, ensure that I’ll lose those last, few, resistant pounds, and be ready to hit the beach this summer.
6. After an isolation period reserved for studying, my creative juices will peak by just imagining the outside world and the taste of a home-cooked meal.
7. Exams encourage Bible study. “Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die” becomes more than just a Biblical conflation.
8. Talk about experience – I can experience the stress of a 60-hour workweek in a high power law firm before I am ever hired.
9. My husband proves the adage, “Absence makes the heart grow fonder.”
10. I want to practice law someday, and this is what it takes!

-Rose Metzger

The Spring Semester is quickly ending at Jones School of Law. For a first year law student the finish line is in sight, except alas, FINALS. For those of you who have put some years between your first year at law school and where you are today, you will properly remember how law finals were the long awaited finale of the semester long marathon. Just like any marathon runner knows, first year law students will spend their time preparing for the last leg of the race with: limited amounts of sleep, high levels of caffeine, and sadly forgetting all of the important points made throughout the semester. Please take a moment to remember each of us first year law students, because just maybe if we do cross the finish line this year, we will get to do the whole marathon next year, as a second year student.

-Brett Smith

Spring Finals are almost near and this is when everything gets crazy. Final exams is a period of time when I exercise regularly, eat three meals a day, drink at least 80 ounces of water, and get 8 hours of sleep each night. However, this year’s final exams mean so much more than the previous years. There are two reasons behind those feelings. First, as a third year student, I only have one exam (YEAH!). The second reason is the realization that I am taking the last law school exam ever required in life (unless I fail, which we hope not!) This year’s final exam brings to my attention that I am finishing a chapter of my life. The actual practice of law is knocking at the door and it is scary. I will now be required to deal with real-life clients and their problems, along with real-life debt repayment. To think that I will have the opportunity to help someone with their problem to the best of my ability and training is overwhelming yet honorable. It will be an honor for people to trust that I can assist them when they have nowhere else to turn. When I place my fears into this perspective, I get excited to take the world of law by storm. However, before I plan my big dreams which may include what type of office furniture I will buy or what color to paint my office I need to come back to planet earth and complete my first task: take and pass my final exam.

-Tamika R. Miller

JSL Happenings:
May 2010
May 22, 2010
Commencement Ceremony
Time: 10 a.m.
Location: Montgomery Performing Arts Center- 201 Tallapoosa St. Montgomery, AL
Speaker: Judge Myron H. Thompson
United States District Court Judge- Middle District of Alabama

If you have any questions about any JSL events or suggestions for article topics, please contact Tamika R. Miller at tanikamiller@gmail.com.
MCBA Young Lawyers Section

By Bill Robertson, President, YLS

The MCBA YLS recently held an after-work social with the Phi Alpha Delta Law Fraternity of the Jones School of Law. The social was held at Bud’s in Old Cloverdale, and there was a great turnout at the social from both the MCBA young lawyers and the Jones’ legal fraternity. We hope to make this an annual event so it is a great networking opportunity for both groups. If you were not able to attend this year’s social with Phi Alpha Delta, we hope that you will try and make it next year.

On April 7th, several MCBA young lawyers volunteered to help with a Phone-a-thon that was organized by the Young Lawyers’ Section of the Alabama State Bar Association. The Phone-a-thon was held at Beasley Allen from 8:30 a.m. to noon in an effort to increase the number of young lawyers who participate in the Alabama State Bar’s Volunteer Lawyer Program. There were other call centers set up in Mobile, Birmingham, and Huntsville. The Phone-a-thon was a great success as the volunteers were able to enroll a combined 147 young lawyers from across the state in the Alabama State Bar’s Volunteer Lawyer Program. This effort will benefit our state tremendously as Alabama is ranked last in the country in providing funding to assist the poor in gaining access to the judicial system.

As for YLS upcoming events, a Biscuits outing has been planned for Thursday, June 24th. The YLS has reserved the Whistle Stop Grille for the outing, and your ticket price of $25 will include your ticket to the game, a meal, and refreshments at our private concession stand. We hope you will make plans to attend this event, and for those of you who work at firms with summer clerk programs, we hope you will plan to bring your summer clerks along as well. You will be receiving email notices about the Biscuits outing in the next couple of weeks.

In July, the YLS will be hosting our annual charity golf tournament to benefit Brantwood Children’s Home. More details on the golf tournament will follow in the coming issues of The Docket, but feel free to contact this year’s tournament chairman, Clay Barnett, clay.barnett@beasleyallen.com if you have any questions about the tournament.

If you have any other questions about the YLS, feel free to contact the YLS officers:
Bill Robertson: bill.robertson@beasleyallen.com
Louis Calligas: lcalligas@balch.com
Megan McCarthy: mmccarthy@hglawpc.com

Veterans’ Court continued from p. 2.

The Veterans Health Care System approached the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit last year about partnering with us to serve veterans. If you know of a veteran who has become involved with the criminal justice system, please contact Judge McCooey’s office to see what, if any, services are available for that veteran. Judge McCooey’s office number is 334-832-1365.

Currently, there are fourteen Veterans’ Courts in the United States. The first Veterans’ Court was started in Buffalo, NY. We are excited to be the first circuit in Alabama to start a Veterans Court.
Cinco de Mayo Fundraiser
Hosted by Montgomery Autauga Elmore Medical Alliance (MAEMA)
Proceeds to benefit One Place Family Justice Center
5 p.m. to 8 p.m. Wednesday, May 5
5 Alley Station Rooftop (downtown)

Enjoy food, beverages, live music and festivities!

The Montgomery Autauga Elmore Medical Alliance (MAEMA) is hosting a Cinco de Mayo fundraiser on Wednesday, May 5, 2010, from 5-8 p.m. at the Alley Station Rooftop in downtown Montgomery to support One Place Family Justice Center. There will be a live band, taco, fajita, and margarita bars, and lots of festivities! Tickets are $100 each and include admission for two people, food and drinks. Proceeds from the event will be used to purchase new medical equipment for conducting sexual assault examinations at One Place FJC, located at 530 S. Lawrence Street, a crucial service provided for victims of rape and sexual assault in Montgomery and surrounding counties. For tickets, call 954-2575 or 832-1656.