

LEGAL AID SOCIETY OF MIDDLE TENNESSEE AND THE CUMBERLANDS

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TENNESSEE ATTORNEYS HONORED FOR PRO BONO WORK

*Legal Services Corp recognizes volunteer lawyers
for aid to low-income clients.*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. July 31, 2007 – Five Tennessee attorneys were recently honored for their pro bono work by Legal Services Corporation – the federal agency created by Congress to promote equal access to justice. LSC presented the awards at a recent meeting of its national board of directors in Nashville.

Andy Branham, Donald Capparella, David M. Cook, Leslie McWilliams and Mary Jo Middlebrooks received awards for their pro bono legal work on behalf of low-income families. They were nominated by four organizations in Tennessee that receive financial support from LSC, as well as by the Tennessee Bar Association.

“In January of this year, the LSC Board adopted a private attorney involvement action plan: Help close the justice gap. Unleash the power of pro bono,” said Helaine Barnett, president of the Legal Services Corporation. “Through this plan, we hope to highlight the potential, opportunities, and challenges of private attorney involvement with LSC-funded programs, and to recognize and acknowledge our appreciation of private attorneys who do pro bono work for them.”

The Tennessee Bar Association nominated Andy Branham, a former in-house counsel for Dunavant Enterprises, International Paper Company and Ployweave International. He currently runs the Memphis office of Counsel On Call. Branham is the immediate past Chair of the TBA Access to Justice Committee, which focuses on cultivating corporate counsel participation in pro bono efforts. He was honored for the pivotal role he played in assembling the Corporate Counsel Pro Bono Initiative Working Group, which raised more than \$71,000 in its first event and introduced scores of new corporate counsel to Tennessee’s Access to Justice community.

Legal Aid Society nominated Donald Capparella of Nashville law firm Dodson, Parker & Behm. Capparella and his associate Gregory Buppert acted as co-counsel with Legal Aid Society in representing a client who needed life-saving medical treatment but was refused care at an emergency room. Because of a severe and untreated mental illness, the client was often loud and threatening to medical personnel who tried to give him the kidney dialysis he needed three times a week. As a result, the local dialysis centers refused to treat him and his insurer would not pay for hospital-based dialysis. The attorney's donated services not only saved the client's life, but also protected the future rights of others who need health care but may not be convenient to treat.

“The real test of the commitment of an advocate is often their ability to work with a difficult or unsympathetic client,” said Lucinda Smith, director of the Nashville Pro Bono Program. “The perseverance of these lawyers in quite difficult circumstances represents what is best about pro bono service and the legal profession.”

Memphis Area Legal Services (MALS) nominated David M. Cook of The Hardison Law Firm P.C.. Cook, who serves as president of the Memphis Bar Association, has been an active pro bono volunteer with the MALS pro bono project on a regular basis since its inception in 1981. He has also been a strong advocate for pro bono participation within his firm and within the Memphis legal community. He was awarded the W.J. Michael Cody Pro Bono Attorney of the Year Award by Memphis Area Legal Services in 2006.

Legal Aid of East Tennessee (LAET) nominated Leslie McWilliams of Chattanooga law firm McWilliams & Smith. McWilliams practices juvenile law in Chattanooga and was named Chattanooga's 2007 Pro Bono Attorney of the Year for her outstanding advocacy on behalf of children. She handles nearly every adoption case placed with LAET's Southern Region Pro Bono Project and helps recruit other lawyers for pro bono work. An expert in her field, McWilliams is a regular contributor to the legal-news feature on WRCB, Chattanooga's NBC affiliate.

West Tennessee Legal Services (WTLS) nominated Mary Jo Middlebrooks of the Jackson law firm Middlebrooks & Gray PA. Middlebrooks was one of the founders of WTLS and has served on its board since 1977. She has provided leadership in the Bar and local community on many access to justice issues. In addition, she readily takes on many difficult cases through the WTLS Pro Bono Project. She founded the firm McWilliams & Gray 30 years ago with her late husband Ernie Gray.

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