



Birmingham VLP Works to Meet the Needs of the Poor in North Central Alabama

As most of you probably know by now, an area of particular importance to me during my term as president is access to justice. Providing free legal services to people living in poverty is one of the greatest services we as lawyers can give.

In the fall of 1995, the Birmingham Bar Association, in cooperation with Legal Services Alabama, established the Birmingham Volunteer Lawyers Program (BVLV). The BVLV has 623 members who provided more than 1,275 pro bono hours of service in 2008. So far this year, the BVLV has handled 360 cases.

Recently, the Birmingham VLP Board of Directors and staff began looking at ways to improve this program. Goals included increasing participation, raising awareness among lawyers about the unmet legal needs in the Birmingham area and better informing the public about the services available through the BVLV. They met with leaders from Legal Services Alabama, the Alabama Law Foundation, the Alabama Civil Justice Foundation, the Access to Justice Commission, and the Mobile Bar VLP to gather information, feedback and inspiration.

Creating a benchmark

"Our next step was to take a good look at our existing program, benchmark other successful volunteer lawyer programs and determine what lawyers, clients, judges and referral sources want the program to deliver," says BVLV Board **President Kelli J. Hogue-Mauro**. "We were lucky that the Birmingham VLP board had an ideal mix of longstanding members with good institutional memory and members newly appointed by our local bar **President Jack Neal** who were eager to respond to the challenges ahead."

The Birmingham VLP crafted a strategic plan which they rolled out during Pro Bono Week in October. Key focus areas of the plan include organizational development, lawyer outreach, public outreach, service delivery, fund development, and board and staff restructuring.

"With more than 4,500 members, our bar has a tremendous opportunity to increase our public service, our profession's reputation and our own collegiality," Hogue-Mauro says. "Our lawyers already give generously in many charitable endeavors. However, there is something we have to offer that no one else can: our skills and experience in affording our clients the protection of law. These are exciting times for our organization and we are looking forward to revolutionizing both the kinds of services delivered and the number of people we serve. The BVLV is committed to providing equal access to justice. We invite you to join us."

BVLV 2009 Board of Directors

The board includes **D. Keith Andress** (Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz PC); **LaVeeda Morgan Battle** (Battle Law Firm); **Robin Leigh Beardsley** (Sirote & Permutt PC); **Steven Lee Cochran**, treasurer; **Samuel H. Franklin**, vice president (Lightfoot, Franklin & White); **Gregory H. Hawley** (White, Arnold & Dowd PC); **Kelli J. Hogue-Mauro**, president (Holt & Cooper LLC); **Edward A. Hosp** (Maynard, Cooper & Gale PC); **Robert A. Jones, Jr.** (Jones & Davis); **Anne W. Mitchell** (Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz PC); **George M. Neal, Jr.** (Sirote & Permutt PC); **Christopher J. Nicholson** (White, Arnold & Dowd PC); and **Hon. J. Scott Vowell**, presiding judge, Tenth Judicial Circuit of Alabama.



Thomas J. Methvin

Thank you, Kelli, and your committee, for your leadership, and I congratulate the Birmingham VLP for a job well done. Thank you, also, to the many attorneys who participate in this program to serve the Birmingham area community. If you're not yet a part of the BVLP, please consider lending your time to provide critical pro bono services.

For more information about Birmingham's VLP, visit www.vlpbirmingham.org, or go to the Alabama State Bar's site at www.alabar.org.

—Thomas J. Methvin, president, Alabama State Bar

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