



THOMAS J. METHVIN



*Montgomery area attorneys, paralegals and law students recently donated their time and talents during the Montgomery County Bar Association's Legal Advice Clinic, as part of this year's Pro Bono Week.*

## "Thank You, Legal Services!"

Estimates show that about 25 percent of Alabama's population, or about 1 million people, live in poverty. In the current economic climate, it is likely that these numbers will grow. Research indicates low-income Alabama households experience more than 700,000 legal problems per year. Common civil problems include consumer and family law issues, as well as issues involving housing, health, public benefits and elder law.

**Legal Services Alabama (LSA)** is the most important resource available to address these needs. LSA is a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to providing access to justice and quality civil legal aid. It operates 10 offices throughout the state, in Anniston, Birmingham, Dothan, Florence, Huntsville, Mobile, Montgomery, Opelika, Selma, and Tuscaloosa. It serves legal needs in all 67 counties in Alabama. LSA helps people by providing representation on critical legal matters in judicial and administrative forums, and by providing free legal counsel, community education and mediation services.

The Alabama State Bar has partnered with LSA in our "**Mortgage Foreclosure Program**." This program was started in 2008 with grants from the **Access to Justice Commission** and the **Alabama Civil Justice Foundation**. The program provides a toll-free hotline for people facing home foreclosure and provides them a free lawyer who works at LSA. The **Mortgage Foreclosure Hotline** (877-393-2333) is promoted throughout the state with public service announcements on television that are sponsored by the Alabama State Bar.

## PRESIDENT'S PAGE Continued from page 9

So far, the hotline has helped more than 3,600 callers. We opened over 3,000 mortgage cases and have completed over 2,300 of those cases. In addition to helping clients, the success of this program creates positive publicity for our bar, which provides these much-needed services.

The partnership with LSA worked so well that we decided to adopt this same model to help with domestic violence cases. We received another grant from the Access to Justice Commission to hire a lawyer to be housed at Legal Services. When we receive domestic violence calls to the Alabama State Bar Volunteer Lawyers Program (VLP), we attempt to place these clients with one of our volunteer lawyers. If we cannot find a volunteer lawyer to help, we send them to the Legal Services lawyer who was hired with this grant. This has worked well and allows us to help a lot of hurting people.

Despite the essential role it plays in our communities, LSA receives no state funding. Instead, it relies heavily



*Royal Dumas, Kimberly Ray-Cobb, Pat Sefton, Theresa Harris, and Tom Gardner, Jr. are all smiles at the conclusion of a successful joint endeavor, the monthly legal advice clinic. Dumas and Sefton are members of the Montgomery County Bar Association (MCBA) and Ray-Cobb, Harris and Gardner are on staff at the Montgomery Community Action Agency (MCAA).*

on the generous contributions of its investors. We must help to increase existing funding sources for Legal Services Alabama so it can hire more lawyers. We have already received substantial pledges from Birmingham-area law firms for this. We plan to do a lot more. We

## Quality Paralegal Education



### ■ Our Mission

The Faulkner University Legal Studies Department seeks to provide a program that supports its students during their academic and professional careers. Upon graduation, students will be well equipped to begin or continue an exciting career as a paralegal.

### ■ What are typical paralegal responsibilities?

Paralegals work in many areas of law including litigation, real estate, corporate, probate and estate planning, intellectual property, family law, labor law, and bankruptcy. Paralegals perform tasks such as investigating facts, drafting legal documents, legal research, interviewing clients and witnesses, maintaining contact with clients, and the maintenance of legal files.

### ■ What can I not do as a paralegal?

A paralegal/legal assistant cannot give legal advice, represent a client in court, establish a fee, or accept a case on behalf of an attorney.

### ■ How do I choose a Legal Studies Program?

One way to ensure you receive a quality education is to choose a program with instruction specific to the skills required for the state. Secondly, it is important to choose a program with academic standards, such as those required by the American Bar Association.

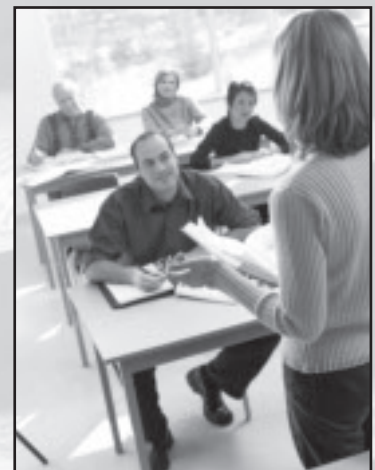
Faulkner University's Legal Studies Program is approved by the American Bar Association. The Faulkner University Legal Studies program offers an ABA Approved curriculum exclusively at its Montgomery campus, with a strong reputation of academic excellence.

### ■ How can I get started?

Legal Study courses are offered at convenient times that cater to the needs of students of all ages. Our faculty is comprised of experienced practitioners with outstanding academic credentials. Contact Marci Johns, J.D., Director of Legal Studies today!

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*MCAA CEO Tom Gardner, ASB President Tom Methvin and MCBA President Pat Sefton taking a break during the November legal advice clinic*

are also increasing awareness of the need for access to justice funding among the public, the members of the bar and the court system. We plan to do a lot more here also.

Many people say that a society should be judged by how it treats the least among it. Lawyers are leaders of society and have a duty to try to help the less fortunate. Legal Services does this by providing a gateway to justice for people in our community. We have the opportunity to raise money for Legal Services Alabama and to be a part of making Alabama a leader in ensuring true access to justice for all. Will you help? You can make a donation at [www.legalservicesalabama.org](http://www.legalservicesalabama.org). It's going to take all of us, working together, to accomplish this. ▲▼▲



*Montgomery Mayor Todd Strange hands ASB President Tom Methvin the proclamation from the City, recognizing Pro Bono Week. Others who helped organize this volunteer effort are MCBA President Patrick Sefton and Pro Bono Committee Chair Royal Dumas.*



*Representing the Montgomery County Commission, Ham Wilson, Jr. (district one) presents ASB President Tom Methvin, MCBA President Pat Sefton and Royal Dumas, chair, MCBA Pro Bono Committee, with the proclamation announcing Pro Bono Week in Montgomery County.*



*Judge John Carroll, dean of the Cumberland School of Law, presents ASB President Tom Methvin with a memento recognizing his dedication to improving access to justice in the state.*

Alabama State Bar **President Tom Methvin** recently addressed 178 first-year law students at Cumberland School of Law and was honored by the law school for his contributions to improving access to justice in Alabama and, specifically, the need for increased pro bono work. Methvin has been a strong advocate for increasing state funding for legal services and has pledged to work with the state legislature. He discussed the professional responsibility that all lawyers have to provide pro bono service that is concomitant with the privilege of practicing law. Cumberland Dean John Carroll presented Methvin with a framed certificate as part of its 2009 Pro Bono Salute.