



LAWYERS RENDER SERVICE: State Bar Fulfills Its Goals for Judicial Education

By Edward M. Patterson

In 2005, the Alabama State Bar responded to a funding shortfall by tasking its Judicial Liaison Committee with raising money so that the state's circuit and district judges could attend the National Judicial College (NJC) in Reno. While the NJC is universally recognized as the preeminent entity in the country offering courses for judicial officers, the Alabama Administrative Office of Courts' (AOC) budget to send our state court judges to the NJC's General Jurisdiction Course—or any other institution in which Alabama's judges could learn alongside those from other states—was lost.

The bar's Judicial Liaison Committee (JLC) responded. Jere Beasley and Sam Franklin, co-chairs of the committee, appointed Teresa Minor, Tom Warburton and Joe Babington to coordinate the process of raising funds for this critical project. Over the course of 2006 and 2007, this subcommittee of the JLC spoke to groups across the state, publicized the need for this funding and promoted the

bar's solution, ultimately obtaining more than \$100,000 from generous members of the bar via solicitation letters, telephone calls and good-natured personal pressure on their friends, colleagues and law partners. The bar's overwhelming willingness to contribute to this worthy effort cut across all lines: large law firms and solo practitioners donated at high rates; attorneys practicing predominantly on behalf of plaintiffs and law firms who traditionally represent defendants also gave generously. Every lawyer in Alabama can be proud of their bar's selfless donation of resources in the service of ensuring that our judges have the tools they need to fairly administer justice.

In 2007 and 2008, the funds provided by the state bar were put to use. Numerous judges from across the state attended the NJC, among them circuit and district judges from Pike, Marion, Coffee and Chambers counties. The experience these judges obtained has resulted in the operation of courts and improved docket management. As stated

by prior attendee Circuit Judge Robert S. Vance, Jr., "The curriculum covered the spectrum of issues confronting trial judges. I found courses dealing with the rules of evidence, judicial writing, handling jurors and general courtroom management particularly helpful."

In late 2008, the JLC and the AOC again tackled the judicial education shortfall. Despite the funds raised by the JLC, and the dozens of trial judges sent to the NJC through the bar's generosity, judicial elections, retirements and appointments had resulted in a high number of judges again assuming the bench without in-depth training in "judging." Led by Tom Warburton, the JLC worked with the AOC to apply for and negotiate funds from the NJC to match those remaining from the JLC's original fundraising. After six month's effort, the JLC announced and delivered a final check in the amount of \$29,182.24 to the AOC, to be matched 100 percent by the NJC in scholarship funds. The AOC anticipates that this nearly \$60,000 will



allow it to send every Alabama trial court judge who had indicated an interest in attending 2009 judicial education to enroll in the NJC in 2009 or 2010.

Callie T. Dietz, administrative director of courts, recently issued the following statement about the Alabama State Bar's work to fund judicial education:

"The Administrative Office of Courts is extremely proud of our partnership with the Alabama State Bar and continuing assistance from the National Judicial College. This is another wonderful example of the private sector joining hands with the public to assist when budgetary constraints force difficult decisions. The ultimate winners in this project are not only our judges who receive the outstanding training of this course, but the citizens of Alabama who come before

them. Thank you to all who participated in or work for this worthwhile project."

This extraordinary result is something of which every member of the state bar can be proud, especially Jere, Sam, Teresa, Tom, and the other members of the JLC who worked long and hard to make it happen. Indeed, lawyers render service to their clients, communities and their profession. ▲▼▲



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