

LAS Kicks Off 2015 Campaign for Equal Justice

NASHVILLE, Tenn., March 20, 2015—Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland kicked off its 2015 Campaign for Equal Justice, Legal Aid Society's annual fundraising initiative, on Tuesday, March 17 with a luncheon at the Nashville City Club. This year, Legal Aid Society's goal is to raise \$800,000 to support its mission to provide free legal assistance to low-income individuals throughout Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland Plateau.

The luncheon sent a message to the community at large: the legacy and important work of Legal Aid Society must live on. This message was affirmed by a keynote panel discussion moderated by Tennessee Supreme Court Chief Justice Sharon Lee and featuring two former Legal Aid Society executive directors: Ashley T. Wiltshire, Jr. and Judge Walter C. Kurtz.

During the discussion, Wiltshire and Kurtz spoke of the challenges the non-profit law firm faced in its early days when the new organization learned it would not receive funding from Washington, D.C. Instead of accepting defeat, Legal Services of Nashville, Legal Aid Society's predecessor, formed a committee to raise the necessary funds.

"This is important to what we are doing today. They went out into the community and raised money to keep this dream alive," said Wiltshire. "They raised \$26,000 (in 1968) and with that money, the organization was able to open its doors." Funding from the federal government, grants and organizations followed, later enabling Legal Aid Society to remain open and operational.

Legal Aid Society's continued perseverance was essential to many key institutional changes in Tennessee. Judge Kurtz reflected on a case in which Legal Aid Society attorneys advocated on behalf of patients with intellectual disabilities at the former Clover Bottom Development Center in Donelson.

“It’s very difficult now to describe the conditions at Clover Bottom in the early 70s. They were just extraordinarily bad. Almost beyond description,” said Kurtz. “They became much better as the result of our lawsuit, with such improvements as new buildings and higher staff-to-patient ratios.”

Following the panel discussion, Legal Aid Society Executive Director Gary Housepian explained why more than 40 years after its founding, Legal Aid Society continues to draw support.

“People want to make an impact. People believe in the clients we serve and represent,” Housepian said. “Doing this type of work and using this gift of the law can really change people’s lives – build their lives stronger, their families stronger and our communities stronger.”

The Campaign for Equal Justice is an annual initiative that raises funds for Legal Aid Society, Tennessee’s largest nonprofit law firm. In 2014, the campaign received over \$787,000. The goal for the 2015 campaign is \$800,000 and is led by Margaret Behm, principal attorney at Dodson, Parker, Behm and Capparella, P.C.

The kickoff luncheon also celebrated the efforts of law firms, attorneys and community partners in advancing the work of Legal Aid Society, including the 2015 Leadership Cabinet – a group of 50 Nashville law firms and in-house legal departments that have committed to giving \$400 per attorney. This year’s new Leadership Cabinet members include: Dobbins, Venick, Kuhn & Byassee, PLLC; Gideon, Cooper, & Essary PLC; Mitch Grissom & Associates; Hale and Hale, PLC; Lindsey + Amonette, PLLC; Nashville Electric Service Legal Department; Pepper & Brothers, PLLC; Prochaska Quinn & Ferraro, P.C.; and White & Reasor, PLC.

Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland advocates for fairness and justice under the law. The non-profit law firm offers free civil legal representation, educational programs and advice to ensure people in its region are able to protect their livelihoods, their health and their families. It serves 48 counties from offices in Clarksville, Columbia, Cookeville, Gallatin, Murfreesboro, Nashville, Oak Ridge and Tullahoma. Legal Aid Society is funded in part by United Way. Learn more at www.las.org, by following the firm on [Facebook](#) or calling Legal Aid Society at 615-244-6610.

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