

# Year-end campaign aims to raise money for Memphis Area Legal Services

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by [Randall D. Noel](#)

We love it when the good guy wins. We cheer when people step up and when what is good and noble prevails.

This delight in seeing compassion and service to others transcends what we read in novels and what we see at the movies. It applies in the everyday world of commerce and in our professions as well.

It is worth reminding ourselves that many of our city's most admired businesses have distinguished records of giving back to the community and furthering social responsibility.

I am pleased to report that those in the legal community -- the lawyers, law firms and law departments who represent the people and businesses of Memphis -- are doing their share to address vital needs in our community.

Members of the legal profession are working diligently in the year-end campaign to support and raise funds for [Memphis Area Legal Services](#).

MALS is the law firm, if you will, that provides legal services to those below the poverty line in our community. Its lawyers do not accept fees for their representation. Most of its legal assistance involves matters of survival: housing, food and families are the issues of the day for MALS' lawyers.

Approximately 9,000 such disadvantaged people in our community receive legal help from MALS each year, but estimates show that this represents only 20% of the unmet legal needs of the neediest in our community.

MALS is funded in part by a grant from the Legal Services Corp., but other funds come directly from the lawyers and law firms right here in Memphis. The profession is also giving its time. Hundreds of Memphis lawyers voluntarily provide pro bono publico (for the public good) work to those without means to pay. Every day, Memphis lawyers are providing legal assistance in housing, income maintenance, family and domestic violence and health and consumer matters.

While the Tennessee Supreme Court encourages such pro bono work, it is not mandated. And while there is a business case for pro bono work -- it helps recruit and retain associates, it assists young lawyers by providing litigation training skills and it can enhance the public image of the

profession -- the bulk of the work and financial contributions stem from a sense of doing the right thing by trying to reach out to those in need.

This year the goal is to make the campaign the most successful in the organization's 36-year history. A commitment of \$220 per lawyer is being requested. Firms giving at this level will be recognized as "Difference Makers."

The push is being made to move all firms with more than 10 lawyers into this category in the days ahead. Our colleagues in Nashville are giving at a much higher rate, largely because of the different mind-set that has been established over the years in the legal community there. We have some catching up to do, but we are about the task of increasing the commitment here by educating lawyers about the city's vast unmet legal needs and by simply suggesting that it's the right thing to do.

Several fine people are serving on this year's campaign team. Irvin and Nancy Bogatin are the honorary chairmen. The coordinating committee includes Jim Barry, chairman for the MALS board of directors; Ben Adams, CEO of [Baker Donelson](#) and 2007 MALS Campaign Committee chairman; Howell McQuain Strategies; Andy Branham, Counsel On-Call director, and MALS executive director Harrison McIver.

Other committee members include: Judge Phyllis Gardner, Danny Van Horn of [Butler, Snow, O'Mara, Stevens & Cannada](#); Richard Roberts and Clint Saxton of [FedEx Corp.](#); Alex Saharovich with [Nahon and Saharovich & Trott](#); B.J. Wade of [Glassman, Edwards, Wade & Wyatt](#); Brian Kuhn, Shelby County government; Harris Quinn of [Williams and Prochaska](#); and Alan Crone of [Crone & Mason](#).

Hopefully, at year end we will have a good story to tell. One where people stand up and do the right thing to meet the legal needs of the poor right here in Memphis. It will be about serving "the least of these." It will be about equal justice for all.

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