Ben F. Jones Law Chapter Chooses Officers

By Andy Meek

The Ben F. Jones chapter of the National Bar Association has tapped new officers and board members for 2013. And the group’s president-elect talks about the group’s work in a way that heralds a continuing service to the Memphis community.

The chapter’s annual Barristers’ Ball was held earlier this month at The Racquet Club of Memphis. Proceeds from the ball are supporting scholarships for minority students at the University of Memphis Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law as well as Memphis Area Legal Services Inc.

Imad Abdullah, an associate in the Memphis office of Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz PC, is the Ben F. Jones chapter’s president-elect. He’ll be the new president Jan. 1. He said the group at the Nov. 3 event gave awards to both MALS and scholarships to first-, second- and third-year students at the law school.

Abdullah said his group intends to be at the vanguard of helping MALS, which long has been a champion of the impoverished who need legal help but can’t afford it. As an indicator of how important the organization is to the community, about 19,000 people called it for help last year.

Memphis Area Legal Services currently is in the midst of a capital campaign to raise funds to continue supporting its work.

“Our work has basically been focused on issues such as access to justice,” Abdullah said. “At the Barrister’s Ball we honored Judge John Fowlkes and Frank Cantrell and Harrison McIver of MALS. They had a shortfall of funding this year, MALS did, and the work they do is so important. We’re looking toward the future not just honoring them with an award but the chapter trying to be out front in helping them with their mission.”

Fowlkes is a U.S. District Court judge, McIver is executive director of Memphis Area Legal Services and Cantrell is the organization’s general counsel. McIver got the group’s president’s award, while the A.A. Latting Award for Community Service went to Cantrell and Fowlkes.

The Ben F. Jones chapter was founded in 1966. Its purpose was to address the needs of black lawyers, with the group’s formation coming at a time when black lawyers broadly were excluded from the bar.

Its namesake, Ben Jones, practiced law in Shelby County from 1949 until his death in 1966. The group’s formal goals include “proactively and visibly” advocating causes that protect and advance the rights of members, families and their communities; promoting diversity within the bar; enhancing public understanding of the law; promoting the rule of law; and protecting the independence of the judiciary.

Every year, the chapter does a fundraiser for the Boys and Girls Club of Memphis. The chapter also tries to provide some meaningful level of professional development to members during the course of a year.

“So we’re not planning on just having meetings to take care of chapter business, but having meetings that have substance and professional development aspects to them,” Abdullah said.
The chapter’s new officers and board members for 2013 are president, Imad Abdullah; vice president/president-elect, Alicia Washington; treasurer, James Jones; corresponding secretary, Amber Floyd; recording secretary, Shayla Purifoy; parliamentarian, Rod Holmes; and new board members, Andre Wharton and Joanne Coston-Holloway.