

Volunteer Lawyers Project recognizes work in legal aid to the poor

September 23, 2014

Former Gov. William F. Winter will be the keynote speaker at the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project Pro Bono Awards Dinner Sept. 25. The dinner begins at 7 p.m. at Gallery 119, at 119 South President Street in Jackson. A reception begins at 6 p.m.

Supreme Court Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr. of Jackson will open the program with welcoming remarks, followed by Mississippi Bar President Eugene M. Harlow of Laurel, and John M. McCullouch of Ridgeland, chair of the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project Board of Directors and Associate Dean of the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Pro Bono awards recognize judges, attorneys, law firms, and law school programs actively involved in delivering free or reduced price legal services to low-income people.

Hinds County Chancery Judge Denise Owens will receive the inaugural Beacon of Justice Award, which recognizes a judge who has exhibited outstanding leadership in promoting and supporting equal access to justice. The purpose of the Award is to foster awareness of the need for the involvement of the judiciary in ensuring the delivery of legal services to the poor, said Tiffany M. Graves, executive director and general counsel of the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project.

Judge Owens has served as co-chair of the Access to Justice Commission since its formation in 2006. In her own court, she has worked to assist self-represented litigants by helping coordinate legal clinics for domestic matters. Judge Owens has worked to improve access to justice for all people since she was a law student at George Washington University. She worked for two years as a law clerk at a Washington, D.C., Legal Services elderly law clinic. Her first job after she completed law school was as a staff attorney for the former Central Mississippi Legal Services. She was elected to the Hinds County Chancery Court in 1989.

The Jackson office of the law firm Baker Donelson and the Mississippi Women Lawyers Association will be recognized as 2014 recipients of the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project Curtis E. Coker Access to Justice Award. The award honors an individual, law firm or other organization that has provided or helped to provide outstanding pro bono legal services during the previous year. The award is named in honor of former Mississippi Bar President Curtis E. Coker, a leading advocate in the cause of making legal services available to all.

Pro Bono Awards will be presented to Walter H. Boone, an attorney with Forman Perry Watkins Krutz & Tardy, LLP in Jackson; Brandi Denton Gatewood, an attorney with the Gatewood Law Firm in Ocean Springs; and Alan L. Moore, an attorney with Baker Donelson in Jackson. The Jackson law firm of McDuff & Byrd, the University of Mississippi School of Law's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program, and Mississippi College School of Law's Family and Children's Law Center will also receive Pro Bono Awards.

The Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project is a joint project of The Mississippi Bar and the Legal Services Corporation. MVLP enlists the aid of private practice attorneys to provide free legal assistance to low income people in domestic matters. MVLP matches private practice lawyers to needy clients in matters including uncontested divorce, removal of minority/emancipation, wills, adoption, guardianship, name change, birth certificate correction, child support contempt, child support modification, conservatorship and visitation.

More information about the work of MVLP may be found in the organization's 2013 Annual Report at this link: <http://www.mvlp.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/2013-Annual-Report10.pdf>.

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